

BRUTAL KINGDOM

For 3 – 4 Players, Ages 12 and Up

GAME OBJECTIVE

The king's court is no place for the faint of heart — or the weak of claw and fang. Here, almost everyone is secretly plotting to sway the balance of power in their direction by using certain characters who will earn them coveted influence tokens. However, the more influence tokens of a certain type there are left unclaimed at the end of the game, the more points each token of this type are worth. You can even gain points by eliminating the beastly characters controlled by your adversaries. The player who has the most points at the end of the game will be victorious.

PLAYING MATERIALS

20 Different character cards in two colors:

10 with light-colored backs and 10 with dark-colored backs



1 Chapel card



8 Overview cards (4 x character overview, 4 x elimination chart)



39 Influence tokens:

13 x blue (royal influence)

13 x green (clerical influence)

13 x yellow (mystical influence)



12 Elimination tokens (8 x 1 point, 4 x 3 point)



1 Starting player card



GAME SETUP

- *Before the first game, carefully remove all of the tokens from their die-cut boards.*
- Each player takes **two different overview cards** and places them face up in front of them. They show the characters in the game and who can eliminate whom.
- Lay the **chapel** face up in the middle of the table.
- Place the **influence tokens** and the **elimination tokens** near the chapel as a **general stockpile**. Sort the influence tokens according to their colors so that you can readily see how many tokens of each color are left in the general stockpile throughout the course of the game.

 **Important:** In a game of **three players**, take **two influence tokens** of each color out of the game.

- The **character cards** with the light-colored backs **should be separated** from those with the dark-colored backs. **Shuffle** the **two** stacks separately.

 **Important:** In a game of **three players**, **only 16 character cards** are used. The characters from ranks 1–4 (**CHARLATAN**, **BLACK KNIGHT**, **COURTESAN**, and **CLAIRVOYANT**) should be removed from the game.

- The player with the most regal demeanor plays first. If there is no consensus over this, the oldest player begins. This player receives the **starting player card**, which is placed in front of him or her. Now the trickery can begin!

HOW TO PLAY

- There are **four chapters** played in total. Each chapter consists of **four rounds**. In every round, each player plays exactly one character card face up by laying it in front of himself or herself. After four rounds, the chapter ends. After the fourth chapter, the game ends and the winner is determined.
- At the beginning of each chapter, every player is always to be dealt **two character cards with light-colored backs and two with dark-colored backs** (see page 3, “The Distribution of Character Cards”).
- Therefore, each player has a hand of **four cards** at his or her disposal each round, which can (more or less) be played each turn. Once all cards have been played, the chapter ends and the **distribution of influence tokens** ensues.



- Every player places his or her character cards **face up**, one on top of the other, so that **his or her last played character card** is always visible on top. Thus, **at the end** of each chapter there is a stack of **four character cards** in front of each player.
- On some character cards there are **influence icons** pictured in the top corners. At the end of the chapter, every player who has character cards marked with influence icons in his or her stack takes an equal number of such influence tokens out of the stockpile.

Important: During a chapter, one or more character cards can be **eliminated** by other character cards (see page 6, “Elimination and Its Consequences”). **Eliminated** cards are **turned over**, so that their portrait sides face **down** in the stack. At the end of the chapter, eliminated character cards **do not** earn influence tokens.



The BISHOP is worth two green influence tokens (clerical influence) at the end of the chapter if he was not eliminated beforehand.



The WITCH is worth one yellow influence token (mystical influence) at the end of the chapter if she was not eliminated beforehand.



*The CLAIRVOYANT is not worth any influence tokens at the end of the chapter, regardless of whether she was eliminated or not, because there is **no** influence icon on her card.*

ORDER OF EVENTS DURING A CHAPTER

The Distribution of Character Cards

- Each player will first be dealt **two character cards with light-colored backs** face down.
- Two additional cards with light-colored backs should be left over. Both of the cards not dealt remain **face down**, laid near one another in the middle of the table (next to the CHAPEL).



- Each player chooses **one** of his or her two cards that the player would like to **keep in his or her hand** and passes **the other card to the player on his or her left** without letting the other players see the face of the card. Each player should then have two character cards with light-colored backs in his or her hand again.
- The same is then done with the character cards that have dark-colored backs. **Everyone** receives **two character cards with dark-colored backs**.
- Both cards left over are placed face down in the middle (next to the two cards with light-colored backs).
- Each player keeps **one of these new character cards** and must **give away the other**, this time to the player to the **right**.
- Now every player has two character cards with light-colored backs and two with dark-colored backs. On top of this, everyone knows a character card of each of their neighbors.



Setup after the Distribution of the Character Cards (in a game of four)



Ranks and the Starting Player Card

- The **order** in which the cards are played is of the utmost importance. The **starting player card** and the **ranks** on the character cards (1 to 20) play a large role in this.
- The player who has the starting player card plays the **first** card of a chapter and lays it face up in front of himself or herself. The other players follow in a clockwise direction.
- When all players have played their first cards and it would become the turn of the player with the starting player card **again**, he or she must check who currently has the **card with the highest rank** lying face up in front of them. The starting player card is handed over to this player. **Note:** *If the player with the starting player card currently has the highest rank, this player keeps the starting player card.*
- The player who now has the starting player card is the first to play the **second** character card of the current chapter and lays it on top of his or her first card, covering the first card. The other players follow in the usual clockwise direction. **Note:** *It is not uncommon that a player who played the last character card of a round then plays first in the next round.*
- This process then repeats in two more rounds for the third and fourth character cards of each player. **Every time a round ends and it would otherwise become the turn of the current starting player** (the starting player card is laying in front of him or her), this player checks who the starting player card must be given to. This player is then the new starting player and begins the next round by playing the next card and so on.



Very important: Before each player reviews the four cards in his or her stack at the end of the chapter, in order to see which (if any) influence tokens he or she will receive, it must still be determined who will next receive the starting player card. This player must then begin the first round of the **next chapter** by playing the first character card.

This rule also applies for the last round of the last chapter, even though there aren't even any cards left to be played. The starting player card also decides who may **first** take the influence tokens that they earned. This can be important in the last chapter if the pile is running low on a certain color.



The CHAPEL and the SAINT

- When a player plays the SAINT, he or she places **one influence token** of his or her choice **from the stockpile** on an empty square on the CHAPEL. It remains there until the end of the game and always counts toward the point-value of that color of token.
- If the SAINT is not played in a chapter, the current starting player places **one elimination token** on an empty square on the CHAPEL, which also serves as an indicator of how many chapters are left to be played.



The Card Instructions

- Most of the character cards have text instructions. This is on the lower part of the card and takes effect as soon as the card is played.
- If the instructions begin with “*you may*” then the player can choose whether or not to activate the effect. All other instructions must be carried out, provided they are possible.
- Further explanations of the card effects are at the end of this rulebook.



Elimination and Its Consequences

- At the end of a chapter, a player can receive valuable influence tokens based on the character cards in his or her stack of cards, provided that these cards have **not been eliminated**.
- The **elimination** of the characters belonging to other players is, alongside acquiring influence tokens, an essential objective during the game. By eliminating other players' characters, a player receives points toward victory, while at the same time, he or she prevents the other players from receiving influence tokens.
- If the effect of one card eliminates the character card of another player, this player must **turn over** his or her **entire stack** (so that the cards are face down). Therefore not only the current character card is eliminated, but also **all of the character cards already played** in this chapter! That means that a player goes empty-handed during the distribution of influence tokens if his or her last character card is eliminated in the last round of the chapter.



***Note:** If a character card is eliminated and there are already cards that have been eliminated (turned over) in the stack, these of course stay turned over.*

- If a card instruction begins with “**eliminate**” then it always **immediately** takes effect when the card is played. This “killer” card is only active at this moment and the elimination takes place **immediately** when it is played. In addition, the “victim” card must of course also be **in play**: At this moment, the victim card must be lying **face up** in front of its player, **on the top** of the stack, in order for the killer card to eliminate it. If that is **not** the case, the killer goes empty-handed. **For Example:** *The POISONER has already been played by a player on top of their stack. Afterward, the BISHOP and the ABBOT can be played without risk, since the POISONER only strikes at the moment it is played.*
- There are however three exceptions that do not take place immediately (see instructions on cards): The KING, the QUEEN, and the EXECUTIONER. The elimination threat posed by these three cards is active until they are covered by the playing of another card. The KING can eliminate the QUEEN and turn her card over. The EXECUTIONER can, with the exception of the SAINT, eliminate **any** character.
- All potential victims for whom there is a killer character who can directly eliminate them are marked with a skull as a warning. The characters who would earn the most influence tokens are the most likely victims.



***Note:** To see who can eliminate whom, players can always check their elimination charts at any time.*

- If a player manages a successful elimination, he or she receives **one one-point elimination token immediately**, which counts for one point at the end of the game. Even when an elimination causes an entire stack to be turned over, the player still receives only one of these elimination tokens.



***Note:** Players can swap three one-point elimination tokens for one three-point token at any time as needed.*



END OF CHAPTER

- After four rounds, once all of the players have played the four cards from their hands, the chapter ends. It should first be checked who receives the starting player card.
- Beginning with the new starting player, each player takes influence tokens for each of his or her character cards that were not eliminated and have

influence icons on them. Should enough of a certain type of influence token be unavailable, then there is **no** compensation for the affected player.

- If the SAINT was not played, the starting player now lays one elimination token on the CHAPEL.
- Afterwards, the character cards are shuffled again and dealt as described for the next chapter.

END OF GAME

After four chapters, the game ends. Then the points are determined for each player:

- **Each influence token** (green, yellow, or blue) earns the player a number of points equal to the number of influence tokens **of that color remaining in the stockpile and on the CHAPEL** at the end of the game.

Example: If the stockpile and CHAPEL card are as pictured below, each green token earns three points, each yellow token four points, and each blue token two points. If there were no more green tokens available in the pile, then each green token would earn two points (because of the two green tokens on the CHAPEL). If there were no more blue tokens available in the pile, then blue tokens would earn no points.



- **Each elimination token** earns the number of points depicted on it (**i.e., one or three points**) regardless of how many are still in the pile or on the CHAPEL at the end of the game.

The player who has the most points wins.

In the event of a tie, the tied player who has the starting player card wins. Should this player not be one of those who tied, then the winner is the tied player who sits closest to the new starting player in a clockwise direction.

TACTICAL TIPS

- To get familiar with the game, players should just practice playing the first chapter. This is the easiest way for players to learn about all of the different characters.
- When composing your hand (by passing your two character cards), you should act thoughtfully. A player who only has character cards with high ranks (potential victims), like the KING, BISHOP, and WIZARD, in his or her hand is not certain to play all these cards safely and runs the risk of losing everything.
- Players should keep an eye on the turn order. A player who is the last to play a card in a round has a good chance to play a character of a high rank safely. If a player plays, for example, the KING as the last card and receives the starting player card, then it is immediately this player's turn again. The KING can then be covered by this player with a low-rank, "non-victim" card, such as the COURTESAN. Then the player has a good chance at winning two blue influence tokens at the end.
- Most of the killer cards have two possible victim cards. A player who has, for example, the KING and QUEEN in his or her hand can try to "draw out" the ASSASSIN with one in order to play the second card safely later.
- It cannot hurt to know where specific cards are. Make an effort to take note of both cards that are passed on.
- Players should also keep an eye on the pile and assess which influence tokens will be valuable at the end and which won't. Should a player successfully play the KING when it's close to the end of the game, and there's only one blue influence token in the pile, this will place the players who already have collected many blue influence tokens at a disadvantage.
- Never give up hope, even if your cards are all eliminated in a round. There are games in which the winners were only able to earn tokens from their cards in the last two chapters.
- You can try to go after the presumed leader. It couldn't hurt.
- Also it doesn't hurt to know in general which cards are in which positions in the middle of the table. Therefore the CLAIRVOYANT, and also the WHITE KNIGHT, the MONK, and the DRUID should not be underestimated.
- Happy scheming, and remember, the law of the jungle is to kill or be killed in this brutal animal kingdom.

VARIATIONS FOR THREE PLAYERS



Instead of always removing the cards of the ranks 1 to 4 from the game, **before each chapter** randomly take out two cards with light-colored backs and two with dark-colored backs and set them aside unrevealed. These four cards are out of play **only for the current chapter**. Before the next chapter, they should be mixed in with the other cards again.

FURTHER EXPLANATIONS OF THE CHARACTER CARDS (refer to this as needed)



CHARLATAN

Should the revived card have an effect, it will not be activated again. Only the revived card itself is turned over. Other characters in the stack that have been eliminated beforehand are not revived. Should a new card of the player fall victim to an elimination, the revived card is of course also affected again. If the player doesn't have any eliminated cards in his or her stack, then the CHARLATAN is simply played without any further effect.



BLACK KNIGHT

The player may still take one influence token of his or her choice at the end of the chapter even if he or she has received an elimination token in the current chapter.



COURTESAN

The player can swap two cards with one player or one of each card with two different players. During the swap, the player lays one card from his or her hand face down in front of the swapping partner. This must be returned with a card of the same color (light- or dark-colored back) from the swapping partner. This player may not look at the card given to him or her beforehand. If the desired swapping partner does not have any more cards of the requested color, then he or she cannot be chosen. The player can forgo a swap and only swap one card. If the player swaps two cards, then the cards must have different color backs.



CLAIRVOYANT

The cards in the middle of the table are to be looked at one at a time. The player must return the viewed cards to the same spots. The player may not switch their positions.



POISONER, BERSERKER, ASSASSIN, ABBOT

If one of these killer cards is already laid down, the corresponding victim cards can be played without risk. Should both victim cards of one killer character be in play, the player must choose the victim; the killer does not kill both potential victims.





EXECUTIONER

You must name the victim immediately when the EXECUTIONER card is laid down. The victim will only be eliminated when the EXECUTIONER card is already laid on top of the stack and the victim card is played afterwards.

The EXECUTIONER is particularly dangerous in the last round of a chapter, especially if the player has kept in mind which character cards have already been played. If the EXECUTIONER is played early on in a chapter, while the players still have many cards in their hands to play, the threat can be easily escaped. The elimination threat posed by this card is active until it is covered by the playing of another card.



DRUID, MONK, WHITE KNIGHT

The player swaps both cards face down. The player selects one of his or her cards and swaps it with a card from the middle of the table that has the same color back. In doing so, the player does not see beforehand the card that is being swapped for, and the other players do not see the card from the player's hand that is replacing it.



INTRIGUER

If the INTRIGUER is itself the card that currently has the highest rank, it remains laid in front of its player and is **not** swapped. Should the swapped card have an effect, it will **not** be activated again.



WITCH

The player may look at the cards of another player at the time the card is played. The player may not swap or tell the other players what they saw.



QUEEN, KING

Unlike the other cards, both of these character cards do not activate their effects immediately upon being played. The victim mentioned by this card will only be eliminated when the killer card is already laid on top of the stack and the victim card is played afterwards. The elimination threat posed by these cards is active until they are covered by the playing of another card.



WIZARD, BISHOP

Other than the KING, these are the only cards that earn two influence tokens when they are played successfully. Therefore they are especially popular targets for other players.



SAINT

This is the only character card protected from the EXECUTIONER. Since there are no other cards that can execute the SAINT, the character cards in the stack under her are protected when the SAINT is laid on top of the stack. If she is covered by a new card in the next round, then this protection is no longer in effect.



INQUISITOR

The player who has the named character card in his or her hand must openly reveal the card. During the swap, the player may not look at the card that is being swapped for beforehand. The INQUISITOR takes effect immediately, (i.e., at the moment he is played). Should no player have the named character card in his or her hand, then nothing happens. The INQUISITOR has a rank of either 20 or 0. As soon as a player plays the card, he or she must choose whether the card has the highest or the lowest rank, thereby deciding whether the player will begin the next round (rank 20) or not (rank 0).



The author: Michael Rieneck, born in 1966, lives in northern Germany. A freelance game designer and writer, he passionately works with games of all kinds. Many of his games have already been published by Kosmos. He is just as comfortable creating simple, small games, such as “Nichtlustig” (“Not Funny”), as he is with his large successes, “The Pillars of the Earth” and “World Without End.” With just 20 character cards, he has managed to make “Brutal Kingdom” into a lively “tit for tat” game.

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