

# CURSED COURT



*The intrigues of the realm's greater nobility are a subject of fixation for the minor nobles whose fortunes can be elevated – or shattered – by what happens at court.*

*In Cursed Court, players take the roles of these minor nobles, who must deduce which combination of the nine greater nobles will sway the court each year and deploy their limited influence accordingly.*



# Overview & How to Win

A game of *Cursed Court* is played over three years at court, each of which has four seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter.

At the beginning of each year, adjacent pairs of players are dealt face-down cards, whose hidden information they share.

At the beginning of each season one new, public card is dealt. Then, in order, each player places a crown on a betting space to indicate a wager for that year. Players may, optionally, place coins with their wagers, to help protect the space from being taken over by a player willing to spend more.

Although players' crowns and coins are sometimes bumped off the board, every player ultimately leaves one crown on the board during each season.

After the Winter season, with four crowns from each player on the board, all hidden cards are revealed. Points are tallied, and each player advances their scoring marker along the track.

After three years, the player with the highest cumulative score wins.

## Components

- 24 wagering crowns (four each of six player colors)
- 120 influence coins (20 each of six player colors)
- 6 score markers (1 each of six player colors)
- 36 noble cards (four each of the nine nobles)
- 1 first wager marker
- Game board

## Preparing to Play

1. **Prepare the Board:** Lay out the board on the table.
2. **Distribute Each Player's Components:** Give each player the four crowns, 20 coins, and scoring marker of a single color. Each player places their scoring marker at "0" on the scoring track.
3. **Assign the First Wager:** Give the first wager marker to a random player.
4. **Shuffle the Deck:** Shuffle the noble cards together into a single face-down deck.



*First Wager Marker*



*Wagering Crown*



*Influence Coins*



*Noble Cards*



*Score Markers*



# About the Board and Cards

The board's key features are its betting regions. There are two types of regions: noble regions and set regions.

- **Noble Regions:** There are nine noble regions, arranged in a three-by-three grid and named for the greater nobles they represent. From the upper left they are the Courtesan, Merchant, King, Priestess, Queen, Duke, Jester, Sorceress, and Assassin.
- **Set Regions:** There are 18 set regions. Each has a unique name and corresponds to a particular group of nobles, who are shown in the small grid at the bottom of that region's medallion. For example, the Opera region corresponds to the Courtesan, Merchant, Priestess and Queen, because those are the four nobles shown in the Opera's medallion grid. Every set region comprises a different group of either three or four nobles.

When a player places a crown to make a wager, it must be placed on a noble region or a set region. For example, as shown here, a crown could be placed on the Queen (a noble region), or on the Wedding (a set region).

A wager on a noble region will score points if at least one card showing that noble has appeared by the end of the year. If no such cards appear, that wager is worthless.

A wager on a set region will pay off only if all of the nobles corresponding to that region have appeared by the end of the year. For example, a wager on the Wedding only scores points if all three of the Priestess, Queen, and Duke all appear. If only two of those appear, that wager is worth nothing.

All face-up cards are placed on the table in a tableau to the side of the board, in the same three-by-three arrangement as shown on the board.

**Important:** In a given year, the nobles on both the face-up cards and face-down cards dealt from the deck will eventually appear in the tableau. The only difference between face-up and face-down cards is who knows what's on them, and when they learn it.



*Wagers can be placed on noble regions and set regions.*



*Face-up cards are placed beside the board in the same three-by-three arrangement the board shows.*

## Beginning a Year

Each game lasts three years. At the beginning of each year, deal one face-down card between each adjacent pair of players around the table. Each player looks at the cards next to them, to both the left and right.

**Important:** In most games, cards are dealt to individual players. In *Cursed Court*, each face-down card is instead dealt to a space between two players who are sitting next to each other. Both of the players adjacent to a card may look at it.

In this way, at the beginning of a year, every player has information about two face-down cards, the one to their left and the one to their right.

## In Each Season...

Once the year has begun, follow these steps in each season:

1. **Pass the first wager marker** to the next clockwise player. For two- and four-player games, skip this step in the Spring (i.e., the first season of each year).
2. **Deal one face-up card** onto the table. It joins the tableau of previous face-up cards (if any).
3. **Each player bets**, starting with the first wager marker and going clockwise around the table.

When a player bets, they have two options:

- **Place a New Wager:** The player places one of their crowns on any unoccupied region of either type. They also place any number of their coins (including zero) under their crown.
- **Bump a Previous Wager:** The player places one of their crowns on any region of either type that's already occupied by another player's crown, but only if they also place enough coins under their crown to bump the previous player's bet (see below).

Once each player has bet, if no one has been bumped, the season ends.

If one or more players have been bumped, play continues clockwise around the table as bumped players re-place their bumped crowns. This continues until all players have the same number of crowns in play. The number of crowns each player will have in play at the end of each season is always the same: one crown at the end of Spring, two at the end of Summer, three at the end of Autumn, and four at the end of Winter.

A player who already has the correct number of crowns in play for the current season when their turn comes is simply skipped over.

Once all players have placed one crown in the current season, a new season begins with the passing of the first wager marker and dealing of a new card, unless Winter was just completed, in which case the year ends.

## Exceptions When Beginning a Year

**Three-Player Exception:** In a three-player game, deal two cards to each location at the beginning of a year. This gives each player information about four face-down cards: two to their left, and two to their right. All of these cards will join the tableau at the end of the year, for an eventual total of ten face-up cards.

**Two-Player Exception:** In a two-player game, players do not share face-down cards. Instead, deal two face-down cards to each player at the beginning of a year. Each player may only look at their own face-down cards. At the end of the year, there will be eight face-up cards in the tableau.





## ***Bumping Previous Bets***

To bump a previous bet, a new bettor must place at least twice as many coins as are stacked under the previous bet in that region. For example, if the red player wants to place a crown onto the Affair, but the yellow player already has a crown and six coins there, the red player must place at least 12 coins on the Affair, along with their crown, in order to bump the yellow player.

A bumped crown and the coins beneath it are returned to their owner. They are immediately available for future bets.

A player who can't play enough crowns to double the bet in a given region can't bump there, and so can't place a crown there. Since each player has 20 coins, a stack of 11 can't be bumped.

**Bumping a Zero-coin Bet:** It takes a one-coin bet to bump a zero-coin bet. This is an exception to the general rule. That is, even though zero doubled is zero, it takes one coin to bump zero coins.

**More Than Doubling:** A bumping player can choose to more-than-double a previous bet when bumping. For example, a red player bumping a three-coin bet could jump to 11 coins, even though six would be sufficient.

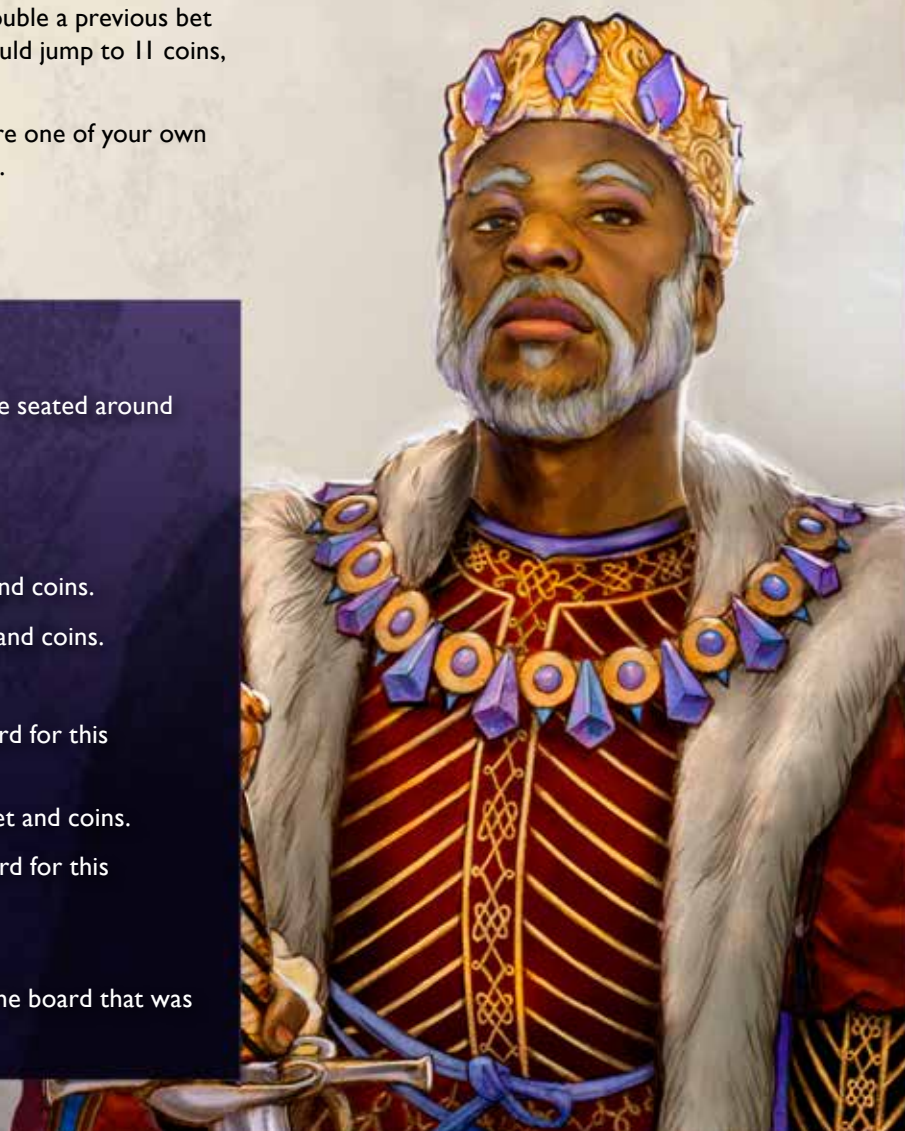
**You Can't Bump Yourself:** You can't place a new bet in a region where one of your own crowns already sits, no matter how many coins you're willing to spend.

### ***An Example Season's Betting***

There are four players: Andros, Bahira, Caliana, and Danae. They're seated around the table in that order, and Andros has the first wager marker.

- Andros bets with 3 coins on the King.
- Bahira bets with 5 coins on the Queen.
- Caliana bets with 7 coins on the King, bumping Andros' bet and coins.
- Danae bets with 14 coins on the King, bumping Caliana's bet and coins.
- Andros bets with 0 coins on the Jester.
- (Bahira is skipped, because they still have a crown on the board for this season.)
- Caliana bets with 10 coins on the Queen, bumping Bahira's bet and coins.
- (Danae is skipped, because they still have a crown on the board for this season.)
- Bahira bets with 6 coins on the Duke.

The season ends, because each player has one betting marker on the board that was placed this season.



## Ending the Year

When the year ends because all four seasons have passed, do the following:

1. All private, face-down cards are turned face-up and added to the tableau.
2. Non-scoring crowns and their corresponding coins are removed from the board. This includes crowns on noble regions where no copies of that noble card appear in the tableau, and crowns on set regions where that set is incomplete because at least one noble in the set did not appear.
3. For each remaining crown, its owner scores points and advances their score marker (see “Scoring,” below). For clarity’s sake, crowns and coins should be removed from the board as they’re scored.
4. All cards in the tableau are shuffled back into the deck, which is now ready for the next year.

At the end of the year, each player should have recovered their four crowns and 20 coins, which become available for the next year.

Finally, the next year begins, or, if this was the third year, a winner is determined.

## Scoring



Players score points for bets on noble regions if that noble appeared at least once in the tableau, and for bets on set regions if all of those nobles appeared at least once in the tableau.

Note that the number of coins beneath a crown does not affect what that crown scores. Coins only serve to protect a crown from being bumped.

**Noble Region Bets:** These wagers score points based on how many copies of that noble appeared in the tableau as shown below. These values also appear in the key on the board.

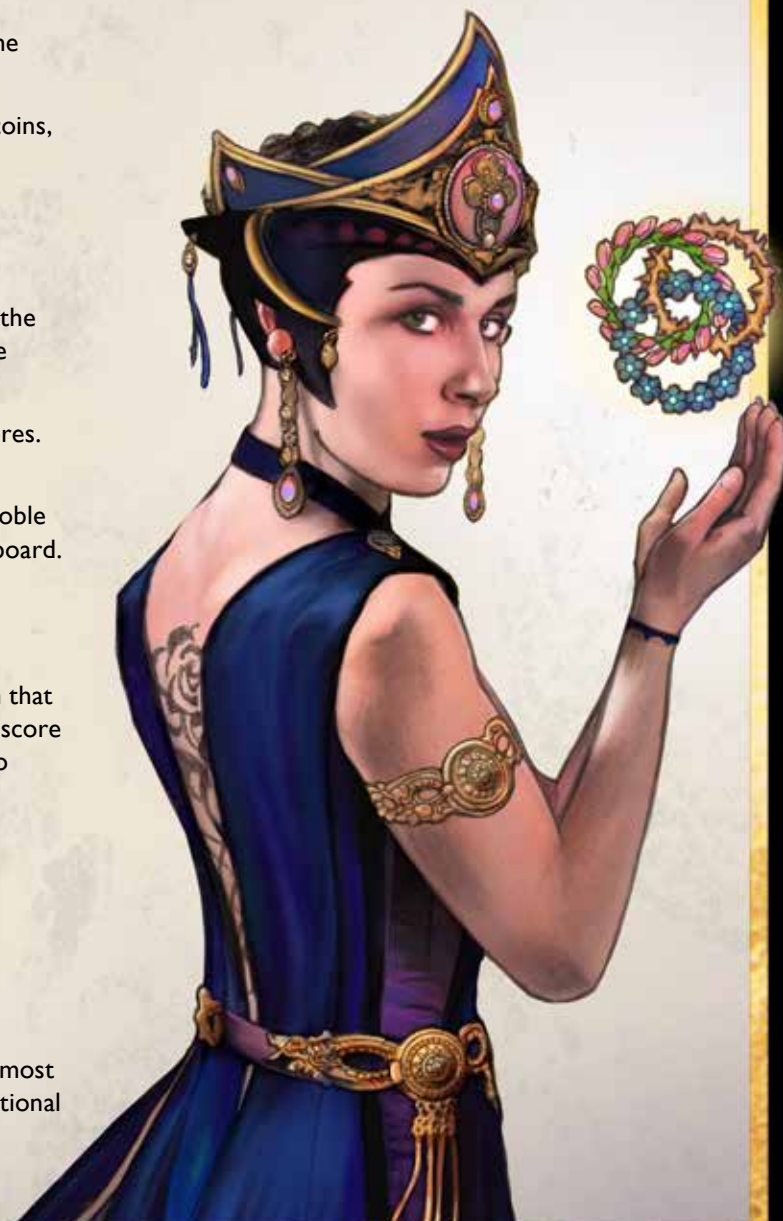
Copies	 1	 2	 3	 4
Score	1	2	5	8

**Set Region Bets:** These wagers score points based on how many nobles there are in that set. These values also appear in the key on the board. Note that duplicate sets don’t score additional points. For example, the Affair can’t score twice (for six points) even if two copies each of the Courtesan, Merchant, and King appear in the tableau.

Set Size	 3	 4
Score	3	4

## Winning

The player with the most points after the third year wins. In the case of a tie for the most points, the players can either play an additional year or declare the game a tie. If additional years are played, all players play them, not only the tied players.





# *Alternate Rules*

## **The Court Remembers**

*Vary the odds and challenge your memory.*

At the end of each year, rather than shuffling the tableau back into the deck, leave those cards out of the deck in the following year. This changes the odds that various nobles and sets will appear in the next year, and rewards players who can both remember which cards are sitting out and keep track of the modified odds. Add left-out cards back to the deck at the end of the following year, such that after the first year, one year's worth of cards is always sitting out in any given time.

For a more forgiving version of this rule, leave the left-out cards face-up so players can refer to them. (Even though they're face-up, they're not part of the next year's tableau. That is, they're face-up as a reminder, not to change the next year's scoring.)

## **The Coinless Court**

*Shorter and simpler.*

In this variant no coins are used, no bumping is possible, and players can share betting regions.

When players bet, they place a crown only (i.e., no coins are placed). A player may add their bet to a region that already has one or more bets, as long as none are theirs. That is, a player may not bet more than once in the same region.

Players must keep track of the order in which multiple bets were placed on the same region. This is most easily accomplished by placing the crowns in a line within each region, from north to south, in the order they were placed.

When a year is scored, a given crown scores one less point for each crown that was placed in that region before it was, with a minimum of zero points. For example, if Andros, Bahira, and Caliana each bet on the King, placing their wagers in that order, and two copies of the King appeared in the tableau at the end of the year, Andros would score 2 points (the normal amount), Bahira would score 1 (one less than normal), and Caliana would score 0 (two less than normal).

## **The Great Exchange**

*Win and lose your influence coins.*

In this variant, players must provide a set of poker chips, which are used in the place of coins, in the same way coins are normally used. Each player receives 100 chips at the beginning of the game. (Using multiple denominations in the obvious way is wise, unless you have quite a lot of chips.)

Score markers are not used, and the chips under non-scoring crowns are not removed from the board at year's end. Rather, at the end of each year, the player who scored the most points in that year collects all of the chips that all players placed on the board in that year. Those chips are added to that player's stockpile and are available for their use in future years. (All players take back their own crowns at the end of year, though.)

Play continues through multiple years until only one player — the winner — has chips remaining.

The Great Exchange can also be played as a banked, continuous cash game (à la poker) in the obvious way, with players being allowed to re-buy 100-chip stacks from the bank between years as they wish.

## **The Royal Masquerade**

*Trick your opponents.*

This variant — which can be played on its own, but which is also compatible with three variants above — requires the game's owner to secretly mark one crown of each color under its base, so the marking can only be seen when the crown is picked up, flipped over, and examined. A marked crown is called a feint.

A feint is placed and otherwise behaves as a normal betting crown, with one exception: at the end of the year it does not score. That is, all feints and any coins beneath them are removed from the board and returned to their owners at the end of the year, before face-down cards are added to the tableau.

When The Royal Masquerade is combined with The Great Exchange, chips beneath a feint are returned to the player who placed them. That is, they are not claimed by the year's winner.

## Quick Reference

**Setup:** Each player takes the components of a single color. Assign the first wager marker randomly. Shuffle the deck.

**Game Length and Victory:** A game lasts three years of four seasons each. The winner will have the most Victory Points.

### To Begin a Year...

- Deal a face-down card between each adjacent pair of players (with exceptions in two- and three-player games).

### In Each Season...

- Pass the first wager marker clockwise (with exceptions in two- and four-player games for the first season of each year).
- Deal one face-up card to the tableau.
- Going clockwise from the first wager marker, each player places a new wager or bumps an existing wager. New bets can include any number of coins (including zero). Bumps must double (or more) the existing bet.
- This continues until all players have added one crown to the board in the current season.

### When a Year Ends...

- All face-down cards join the tableau.
- Non-scoring crowns are removed from the board.
- Remaining crowns are scored.
- All cards are shuffled back into the deck. The next year begins (after years one and two) or the game ends (after year three).

## Credits

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