

Agents of the Crown

Standard Deck Version, v1.0

Crab Fragment Labs, 6/30/2021

Development Status: *After years of intermittent testing, this game has yet to assume its final form. This adaptation of Agents of the Crown is designed for a standard poker deck. We still have open questions about issues like game balance and comprehension (playing without turns is tricky), so we hope you'll take a chance to try out the game and give us your feedback at crabfragmentlabs.com/about.*

Game Summary: You and your companions represent four rival Houses, battling for superiority in a kingdom beset by challenges. You will use luck, skill, and guile to fend off dangers, protect the realm, and prevail over your enemies.

Players: 4

You Need: A standard deck of cards, roughly ten "curse" tokens, and a way to keep score.

Defining the Card Blocks: The deck is divided into three categories: Banners (Aces), Commons (2 - 9), and Nobles (10 - King).

To Begin: Assign each player a House by shuffling the four Aces (Banners) and dealing one to each player, face up. This House is your identity for the game. You will score points based on the success of your House, as well as the success of the player *to your left*.

Sequence of Play: The game takes place over four "years," each of which is composed of four "seasons." Players receive new hands at the beginning of each year, and play four rounds, or seasons, scoring points for success, and losing points for failure. After four years, the player with the highest score wins.

Starting the Year: Separate the Commons (2-9) and Nobles (10-K) into two separate decks. Shuffle both decks, and deal every player four cards from each deck, face down. This will distribute all of the Nobles, and half of the Commons, leaving one deck of 12 Commons.

Each player now passes two cards to the left, including one Noble and one Common. Note: when passing, remember that your score depends on the success of the player to your left.

Deal the remaining Common cards into four facedown stacks of 3, 4, 4, and 5 cards each. These stacks will represent the four seasons: Spring (3 cards), Summer (4), Fall (4), and Winter (5 cards).

Starting Each Season: Turn over the cards for this season, and divide them into piles of matching suit. Each of these piles is a "challenge," a threat to the realm, specifically to the matching House. Each challenge is treated as a single number, equal to the total value of the cards in that pile. For example, if a challenge contains the 3 and 6 of Clubs, that is a single 9-point challenge.

To combat these challenges, each player now plays one card from their hand. There is no turn order. Players may play quickly or take their time, but please don't delay the game. You may play your card face up or face down, you may place it anywhere on the table (for example, as a bluff about which threat you are fighting), and you may lie about your play, strike deals with other players, break deals, and so on. However, once your card is flat on the table, you may not move it or change it in any way.

Once each player has played one card, reveal all these cards, and resolve each challenge as follows:

- **Sorting the Plays:** All played cards of the same suit work together against the matching Challenge. (If there is no Challenge of that suit, see “Stray Cards” below.)
- **Common Cards:** Cards of rank 2 through 9 are worth their face value. A total value that is equal to or higher than the challenge will defeat it. A lower total will not.
- **Nobles:** Cards of rank 10, J, Q, and K have infinite value; a single one of these cards is high enough to defeat a challenge of any size.
- **Challenge Defeated:** If a challenge is defeated, the players who played cards into it will take prizes from the pile, if they can. Each player takes one card from the pile, starting with those who played the highest cards. These prizes are worth their face value in points. Sometimes there will be leftover cards in the pile; those are discarded. Other times, a player will not get a prize at all, because there were not enough prizes to go around.
- **Challenge Not Defeated:** If insufficient cards were played to defeat a challenge, the cards from that pile remain into the next season. In addition, the House of that suit gains a Curse, and so does the House *on their right*.
- **Stray Cards:** If a played card does not match any of the existing Challenges, that card becomes a threat. It is added to the next season’s challenges, if there is another season.
- **Discards:** All cards played on this round, except stray cards mentioned above, are discarded.

A Full Year: Play all four seasons, and then tally your scores for the round.

Scoring: At the end of the Year, players score points for their prizes, and also for the Nobles *remaining in their hands*. They will also score or lose points depending on the distribution of Curses.

- Prizes: For each prize card, score its face value in points.
- Nobles: For each Noble that is still in your hand, score as follows:
 - If that Noble’s House has no Curses, 10 points.
 - If that House has one Curse, 5 points.
 - If that House has two or more Curses, 0 points.
- Curses: For every Curse on your House, and the House to your left, lose 5 points.

Note: Curses are removed at the beginning of every new Year.

A Full Game: Play four years, and then the player with the highest score wins.

Game History: Agents of the Crown was designed in a four-part game design workshop at KublaCon 2016, organized by James Ernest. The game was further refined by the Cheapass Games guinea pigs and Crab Fragment Crew. As mentioned above, we struggled with making this a custom-deck game, but the deck remained so close to the original poker deck version that we finally decided to release it as a free standard deck game.

Playtesters included Jason Dwyer, Joshua Howard, Andrew Looney, Derek Mantey, Nora Miller, Carol Monahan, Paul Peterson, Rennie Saunders, Jeff Wilcox, Leila Zucker, and many many others.

Special Flavor Section:

Although this game is presented as a standard-deck game, it came very close to becoming a custom deck. We decided to make this version a free game with a standard deck, simply because we didn't need one more custom deck in the mix, at least not now. However, we're including this flavor section as a way to inject a little personality into this version. At some point, we might also make this version of the deck.

The four houses in Agents of the Crown are based on four noble houses of Carrisor, the setting of several Crab Fragment games. They are:

- **LaForêt (Clubs):** The lush but poor agrarian Principality of LaForêt is constantly at odds with the Crown, desperate to take command of the Kingdom, but too poor to do it alone, and unwilling to court the necessary allies. Threats in Clubs include crop failures, labor revolts, and Dragons.
- **Baronet City (Diamonds):** The wealthy and arid Sierin peninsula is home to the most powerful merchant families in the Kingdom. They claim neutrality, but also control the purse strings in every conflict. Threats in Diamonds include pirates, trade wars, and Dragons.
- **The Burning Tower (Hearts):** The center of the prevailing faith is also the nexus of a powerful web of spies. But the Holy See is its own worst enemy, and challenges to the Church come mostly from within. Threats in Hearts include schisms, enemy spies, and Dragons.
- **Iona Castle (Spades):** The royal seat of power in Carrisor, Iona Castle claims dominion over the continent, and faces constant challenges from all sides. Threats in Spades include hostile invasions, political intrigue, and most of all, Dragons.

You can learn more about Carrisor at its [World Anvil page](#).