

Vassal

A standard deck area control card game for two players.

v1.0

Introduction

Vassal is a two player card game in which you try to win over the allegiance of nine noble houses.

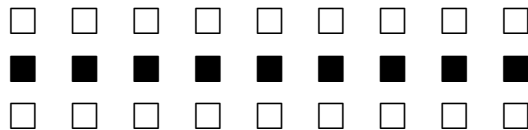
The ultimate **object of the game** is to win the allegiance of either any 5 noble houses or 3 adjacent noble houses by forming alliances with people of influence.

Setup

Vassal is played using a **standard deck of 54 cards (incl. 2 jokers)**, representing people of influence, and **9 tokens of your choice**, representing each of the noble houses.

Set up the game by placing each of the 9 tokens in a straight line between you and your opponent. Space the tokens widely enough to make room for cards in front of the tokens.

The setup is illustrated below where \blacksquare represents a token and \square represents a space in which you can place your cards.









Put the two jokers aside, then shuffle the deck of cards and place it face down on the table. This is the **draw pile**.

Finally, deal 1 joker and 6 random cards from the draw pile to each player's hand. You can inspect your own hand at any time but never see your opponent's hand.

Forming alliances

You win allegiances by assigning people of influence (cards) to the noble houses (tokens). You can assign a total of three cards to each noble house. These three cards constitute an **alliance**. Your opponent will be forming alliances as well and to win allegiance from a noble house you must ensure you form the stronger alliance.

There are five **tiers** of alliances you can form. These are listed below from *highest* to *lowest*:

	Coup	In sequence and of same suit
	Scheme	In sequence and of same color
	Plan	In sequence
	Intent	Of same suit
	Motive	Of same color
	Discord	Any other alliance

The order in which cards are played does not matter when determining an alliance's tier.

An alliance in a higher tier is always stronger than an alliance in a lower tier. When two alliances belong to the same tier, the strength is determined by the *combined rank* of the alliance (aces have rank 1, jacks 11, queens 12, kings 13).

Example: $2♠ 3♥ 4♣ > 2♠ 4♣ 6♠ > 2♠ 4♥ 9♣ > 2♠ 4♥ 6♣$

Jokers are wildcards and can mirror any other card. A joker always has the rank and suit that maximises the strength of the alliance in which it takes part.

Winning allegiance

When both you and your opponent has assigned an alliance (3 cards) to a noble house, the player with the strongest alliance claims a **pledge of allegiance** from that noble house. If the two alliances are equally strong the player who first assigned a full alliance to the house claims its allegiance.

At the end of your turn you may also claim a pledge of allegiance from one or more other noble houses to which you have assigned an alliance, if you can *prove* that your opponent is unable to assign an even stronger alliance to these. You must prove this based on the cards on the table (and your knowledge of which cards constitute the full 54 card deck). Remember to take jokers into account.

Place the noble house token on the winning side to mark a pledge of allegiance.

Playing the game

Choose a starting player who will take the first turn.

On your turn you **(1)** *must* assign a card to one of the noble houses. Place that card in front of the token representing the noble house of your choice. Next, **(2)** draw a card to your hand if the draw pile isn't empty (skip this step if it is empty), **(3)** evaluate allegiances, and **(4)** check the winning conditions.

It is now your opponent's turn. Alternate taking turns this way until the winning conditions are satisfied by either you or your opponent.

The **winner** is the first player to claim a pledge of allegiance from either **any 5 noble houses** or **3 adjacent noble houses**.

Quick reference







Object of the game

Win the allegiance of any 5 noble houses or 3 adjacent noble houses.

Turn

1. Play a card
2. Draw a card
3. Evaluate allegiances
4. Check winning conditions

Alliance tiers (higher/stronger tiers on top)

	Coup	In sequence and of same suit
	Scheme	In sequence and of same color
	Plan	In sequence
	Intent	Of same suit
	Motive	Of same color
	Discord	Any other alliance

Alliance strength

An alliance's tier determines its strength.

The strength of equally tiered alliances are determined by the combined rank of their respective cards (aces have rank 1, jacks 11, queens 12, kings 13).

Equally tiered and ranked alliances are won by the first player to complete his/her alliance.

Wildcards

Jokers are wildcards and can mirror any other card in the game.

Background

Vassal was designed to provide an experience similar to Reiner Knizia's Schotten Totten and Battle Line using only a standard deck of playing cards (and a few tokens), without losing the streamlined and elegant nature of the those games.

Schotten Totten and Battle Line have been designed such that the number of colors (6) and values (9 in Schotten Totten, 10 in Battle Line) make the different combinations gradually more common. Unfortunately, the used combinations don't translate very well to a standard deck as the probability of drawing each combination will be much less nicely distributed.

The below table shows the probability of drawing these combinations in a three card hand (in Schotten Totten, Battle Line, and a standard deck):

Combination	ST	BL	STD
Color-run	0.17%	0.14%	0.20%
Three of a kind	0.73%	0.58%	0.24%
Color	1.86%	1.96%	4.98%
Run	5.93%	4.91%	2.99%

Other common hands, such as those of 3-Card Poker, suffer from the same problem. The tiers in Vassal have been designed to better align with the probability distribution in Schotten Totten and Battle Line.

Tier	Probability
Coup	0.20%
Scheme	0.60%
Plan	2.39%
Intent	4.98%
Motive	17.95%

The additional Motive tier was added to ensure a consistent ruleset (a Motive is to a Scheme what an Intent is to a Coup), but does also slightly affect some of the strategical aspects of the game.

The jokers were added as wildcards to avoid edge cases regarding incomplete alliances and to ever so slightly minimize the impact of luck.

Variants

The below variants (optional rules) can be used as desired to make Vassal a bit more similar to Schotten Totten and Battle Line, at the cost of slightly less elegant gameplay.

No Motive tier

Schotten Totten and Battle Line only define five types of card combinations, unlike the six tiers used in Vassal. Ignore the Motive tier to reduce the number of tiers to five.

No wildcards

When setting up the game, remove the two jokers from the deck and deal 7 random cards from the draw pile to each player's hand.

If the winner has yet to be determined when all cards have been played, each player will have one **incomplete alliance** (2 cards) on their side of the table. A full alliance is always stronger than an incomplete alliance. Determine the strength of two opposing incomplete alliances as if they were Discords (highest combined rank wins). In case of a tie the starting player wins the allegiance.

Example:  >  > 

When the game ends this way, the winner is determined solely by the highest number of allegiances.