

DEFINING KINGMAKER RULES:  
A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

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History of Kingmaker rules:

Kingmaker was published in 1974 by Avalon Hill. Avalon Hill is America's leading wargame publisher, founded in the late 1950s to simulate historical battles. In 1983, Kingmaker was remarketed by Gibson Games, who own the rights to other "adult" boardgames such as Diplomacy.

The remarketing in 1983 introduced "Optional" and "Advanced rules". For example, "Optional" includes voting in Parliament, whereas the "Advanced game" mainly consists of extra event and crown pack cards.

For the purposes of this report, "1974" and "1983" shall be taken to refer to the two versions of the basic rules.

1. Ships and ports:

a) Involuntarily entering neutral or unfriendly ports

The owning player can stop the ship from sailing. 1974 states that, if involuntarily entering an unfriendly port (i.e. either to take refuge, or in answer to an event card such as "Admiral to Lynn with two ships"), the ship can freely sail away the next turn unless it has placed itself under the protection of the port's garrison.

1983 attempts to clarify this by saying that a ship which involuntarily enters an unfriendly port can only leave with the permission of the player owning the port. Furthermore, that any passengers on board must attempt to besiege the port if able (this also applies if the port is neutral.) If unsuccessful or unable, they end their move "in the port square in the open". Note here that the 1983 board is helpful in showing clearly that the port and the port square are one and the same, by placing the anchor on the mainland rather than in a separate blue square as with 1974.

This seems to mean that a ship involuntarily entering an unfriendly port is "inside the town walls" (as it must actually gain entry) whereas the passengers are ejected outside unless they

successfully siege the town. Allying this to the rule that states that passengers cannot remain on board ship in port but must disembark, suggests that passengers cannot subsequently reboard the ship, i.e. "coming inside the town walls" without the permission of the port owner.

If the port is neutral, similarly passengers cannot reboard as it is clearly stated in both 1974 and 1983 that embarkation can only take place from a friendly or unfortified port. The ship itself can leave.

#### b) Sieges or battles from ships

Attacks are allowed from ships, either on castles or towns or "on forces in open country". Delay by bad weather means that the force lands. What then happens to the ship, and can the passengers reboard?

Analogy with the previous section on involuntarily entering ports would suggest that the ship enters the port but the passengers finish the move in the port square in the open rather than "inside the walls" (otherwise, the absurdity would arise whereby a siege from sea would automatically succeed since the passengers would gain entry to the town either by a successful siege or by bad weather delaying attack)

#### c) Embarking

1974 states that both ship and passengers must remain on the same square for the period between moves. 1983 clarifies this rule to allow for embarkation of forces ordered to a port by an event card, allowing the ship to embark any nobles which are in the same square at the start of the movement phase.

## 2. Transferables

#### a) What can be transferred and when

1974 states that cards may be transferred at Parliament: nobles attending can swap **bishops**, **towns**, **ships** and **mercenaries**, these four categories being known as "transferables." They can also swap offices, which are known as "semi-transferables" , with the permission of the king.

1983 extends this to allow the first four to be transferred to nobles in the same square so long as the card is not used in the turn of transfer. There seems no obvious reason not to allow this.

## b) Capturing towns, cities and castles

The above belonging to an executed noble are given to a victorious noble. However, if one of these places is captured then the card is transferred to the faction and placed by itself, not given to a noble. Hence, such places which have been gained through siege can only be lost by being captured by another player, or by being transferred to another noble if a representative from each faction occupies the same square.

## c) Trading cards

1983 makes it clear that "transferables" in the hand can be given to other players but cannot be used in the turn of trade. It also states that free move cards cannot be traded.

## 3. Responding to event cards

Nobles, or the king in the case of an embassy, do not respond to event cards if under siege or not on the mainland. If the king is summoned by an embassy, any nobles with him may go as well (the idea that only one noble may go was a "house rule" that was tried in the mid-80s).

## 4. Castles, towns and cities blocking roads

1974 states that only unfriendly towns block the road, unless the owner allows passage. 1983 completely contradicts this, allowing that neutral towns block the road.

1983 seems logical: a road must run through a town otherwise the owner could not block passage. Hence, to pass through a town on a road one must be able to enter the town. Since the only way one can enter a neutral town is by a successful siege, the implication is that one cannot pass through a neutral town on the road.

## 5. Battles

### a) Steps leading up to a battle

Both sets of rules quite clearly state that there are three steps leading up to a battle:

- (i) the attacker announces which nobles are attacking and who he is attacking
- (ii) both players add up their strengths and they are compared as a ratio
- (iii) the attacker draws the event card

By having three distinct steps, the implication is that one cannot attack "in one fell swoop" whereby the attacker simultaneously announces an attack and turns over the event card.

Furthermore, since as section (b) below outlines, both sets of rules explicitly allow crown pack cards to be declared at any time, if such an act was allowed there would be endless potential for arguments about whether a card was declared before the event card was turned over etc.

#### b) Declaring crown pack cards before a battle

Both sets of rules allow crown pack cards to be declared at any time, and also that "There are few things more devastating than for a player to reveal that ... a force which is just about to be swallowed up in a remote castle now includes 30 or 50 more troops which the attacker has to match."

The implication is that a crown pack card can be declared after someone has moved and declared an attack, since before they have declared an attack they cannot, by definition, be called an "attacker".

The best way of dealing with this would seem to be that, once step (i) and (ii) are followed, the defender is given the option of declaring any cards. If he does not, the event card is turned. If he does declare extra cards, the attacker can then add more, and the defender is given another option to add more, until all have declared all they wish.

Combat is always optional, and can be called off at any time prior to a card being drawn.

#### c) Declaring crown pack cards when under siege

The rules bar adding cards to nobles under siege. The question is, when does a defending force become under siege? Once an attacker announces his intention to attack, or when the event card is drawn (since the rules state that if bad weather delays attack, the defenders are indeed "under siege")?

To resolve this question, it is helpful to remember that combat can be called off at any time before an event card is drawn. This implies that combat does not begin until the event card is drawn. By analogy with this, it seems that a siege does not begin until the event card is drawn, and therefore the defenders are free to declare cards. If bad weather delays attack, the town remains under siege and therefore the defenders cannot add any cards, unless the attackers forces drop below the required amount to maintain the siege (either by the attacker being called away, or being attacked by another faction).

#### d) Sallying forth under siege

Defenders may sally forth from behind their walls to do battle with their attackers. The rules do not say what happens if the battle is unresolved (either by bad weather or because of insufficient odds). However, it would seem logical to say that the siege continues (with the town's defenders returning behind their walls), otherwise the absurdity would result of defenders being able to break a siege merely by carrying out a sallying attack irrespective of that attack's result.

#### e) Leaving out nobles

1983 states that "any number of nobles in the same force may combine their strength for an attack." This implies that certain nobles may be left out. 1983 goes on to say that "nobles in the same force cannot attack or be attacked separately." What this means is that, although an attacker may leave out certain nobles in his stack from an attack, he cannot use them to do a subsequent second attack in the same turn if the first attack fails.

#### f) After a siege

Victorious nobles may end their turn inside the captured town, implying that certain nobles may stay outside.

#### g) Ambushes

The 1983 optional rules suggest that where an attack is made at less than 1:4 odds (popularly known as a "suicide attack"), **only the last named noble on the event card is killed**. Such attacks are given the term "ambush". This seems sensible as otherwise a force of ten men can have a disproportionate effect on the endgame, in what is really an art of bagatelle.

## 6. Parliament

### a) Moving to Parliament

1974 had no restrictions on going to Parliament or on being summoned. 1983 changed this, saying that nobles may be summoned, or voluntarily go if on the mainland. The only exception is if an empty ship, belonging to them or loaned, is available to transport them (the ship ends its move at a friendly or unfortified port on the mainland, presumably chosen by its owner). Optional 1983 allows unrestricted return.

### b) Parliament may be summoned by the Chancellor

No guidance is given in 1974 as to the use of this card. 1983 states that it may only be picked up by the Chancellor, and if he is killed or executed the card returns to the event pack. It cannot be traded.

### c) Voting in Parliament

This comes under the "optional" rules in 1983. The intention is obviously to reduce the power of the king. This seems to be a good idea since otherwise the player controlling the king often runs away with the game. However, only in the 1983 version of the game are the voting strengths written on the noble cards.

## 7. Alliances

1974 and 1983 contradict each other, in that in 1974 it is the nobles which are allied, whereas in 1983 it is the faction which is allied. The details are as follows:

### a) 1974

Allied nobles of one faction are placed on the card of a nominated "commander" of the other faction. Only nobles who were on the same square for one round until the turn of the last player to join, can be allied. They are then part of his force until the alliance ends. The alliance can only end by mutual consent or when the Commander dies.

### b) 1983

The last sentence above led to the obvious absurdity whereby one faction wanted to break an alliance but could not do so unless the

other faction agreed or the Commander died. Also, alliances were short-lived as nobles were quickly called away.

Hence, 1983 changes things by stating that nobles in the same square can combine forces for combat and or movement. Instead of their counters being removed from the board, their cards are placed under the "commander" from the other faction. The commander moves the nobles in his turn but they need not stay in the same square. The commander decides the division of spoils from any combat.

A new commander is chosen if the nobles involved are in the same square. If he is killed, the cards return to the owning players.

Alliances can be terminated at any time but there must be a round of peace between the former allies.

These rules seem to avoid the pitfalls of 1974 without introducing any new ones, and therefore should be preferred.

## 8. The Plantagenets

### a) The Plantagenet and the royal piece

These nobles appear only in the 1983 Advanced rules, and are given to the faction with the first in line of each house, although they need not be played immediately. If killed, they are returned to the faction. These points both imply that they are not synonymous with the royal piece. Hence, there should be no requirement that the noble remains with the royal piece.

### b) When the first in line is killed or captured

The card and any awards is given to the new controller of the first in line.

### c) When the noble is killed

The card is returned to the player owning the first in line, but all awards are lost. The problem is that, particularly in the endgame, the Plantagenets could be used for numerous ambushes, with the guarantee of the noble returning to the same player (with other nobles, where an ambush is successful the player is only guaranteed a card from the crown pack). Hence, it seems reasonable to continue to play the 'house rule' which bars Plantagenets from carrying out ambushes.