

# Domino Knights, v0.8

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## **Abstract**

Domino Knights is an alternative to the numerous battle-focused, collectable card games on the market today. Instead of special cards, it uses games that you may already have in your bookshelf: a set of dominos, a deck of cards, and pencil and paper. The concept of the game is simply to defeat your opponents in battle using Knights you've trained from the Peasants of the countryside. This game is designed for two to six players.

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## 1 Introduction

Domino Knights is an alternative to the numerous battle-focused, collectable card games on the market today. Instead of special cards, it uses games that you may already have in your bookshelf: a set of dominos, a deck of cards, and pencil and paper. The concept of the game is simply to defeat your opponents in battle using Knights you've trained from the Peasants of the countryside. This game is designed for two to six players.

Dominos are used to represent the Peasants a player recruits and trains into Knights with which she battles opposing Kingdoms. One side of the domino represents an attack power, and the other side represents a defend power. Which side is use for attack or defend is determined by how the player brings a Knight in to play.

The standard deck of cards provides randomness and variety to the game by determining the type of Knight you bring in to play, and by providing special abilities to those Knights. It is recommended that you use one standard deck with the Jokers for every three players.

The pencil and paper is used to track a player's Kingdom Health points, which start out at  $3 \times$  **maximum pip value** of the domino set. For example, if the maximum pip value for the domino set is 9, each player's Kingdom Health Points starts out at  $3 \times 9 = 27$ . When a player is reduced to zero Kingdom Health Points, that player is no longer able to successfully maintain an army; she is ejected from the game. The game is won by the "last player standing," the last player with Kingdom Health Points.

## 2 Terminology

Every new game comes with new terminology to learn, and this one is no exception. The following list describes the most important terms to know for this game. For the sake of examples throughout this article, four players will be used: Alice, Bob, Charlie, and Dianne.

**Attack** : third phase of a player's turn.

**Battlefield** : not an actual area on the table, merely a term referring to the Knights involved in a single battle

**Candidate** : a pips-down domino lying on top of training cards in front of the player. Promoted to a Knight during the player's next Maintenance phase.

**Cleanup** : fourth phase of a player's turn

**Deck** : face-down pile of cards in the center of the table

**Discard** : fifth phase of a player's turn. Also refers to the act of placing an unwanted card face-up on the discard pile.

**Discard Pile** : face-up pile of cards next to the deck. A player may only draw one card from this pile during the Draw phase.

**Draw** : refers to drawing both Peasants from the countryside and drawing cards from the discard pile and/or deck.

**Kingdom** : Synonymous with Player

**Kingdom Health Point** : tracks the relative success of a Kingdom in battle

**Knight** : a pips-up domino lying on top of face-up training cards in front of the player. Tap to attack or defend in battle with other Knights. Untap at the next Maintenance phase of the player.

**Graveyard** : a pips-up stack of defeated Knights located in front of each player

**Maintenance** : first phase of a player's turn

**Peasant** : a pips-down domino in the center of the table. Draw Recruits from this pool at the beginning of the Maintenance phase.

**Pip** : the dots on a domino.

**Push** : an Attack resolution where neither Knight defeats the other.

**Recruit** : a pips-down domino in front of the player. Use training cards to promote to a Candidate.

**Special Card** : a card that can be used at any point in the game to influence Peasants, Recruits, Candidates, or Knights.

**Tap** : commit a Knight to an action by shifting the domino 45 degrees to center. Knight may perform no further actions following resolution until the next Maintenance phase of the player.

**Train** : second phase of a player's turn

**Training Card** : the face value of the cards from 2 to King used in sum to train Candidates.

**Training Cost** : equal to the sum of the pips on a domino

**Untap** : reset or realign a Knight to center so that it may perform actions again.

### 3 Setup

Game play begins with Players naming their respective Kingdoms. Have fun with it! Next, determine the goal of the game, whether it is “last Kingdom standing” or “Healthiest Kingdom after  $T$  minutes.” See the section on “Winning the Game” for more details.

The first Kingdom to start the game is determined by a random card draw. The player with the highest card value goes first, with Kings being highest and Aces lowest. If there is a tie between the highest drawn players, draw again until a winner is determined. The cards are placed back in the deck and reshuffled. Five cards are dealt to each player, who may look at their cards at any time.

Dominos are shuffled, faced-down in the center of the table. These dominos are known as *Peasants*. Each player draws two Peasants and places them pips-down in their pool of Recruits. As Knights are defeated in battle, they are placed pips-up in a player’s graveyard stack. If there is ever a case where the Peasants are exhausted, players return all but the top domino of their graveyard stack to the Peasants pool.

The deck of cards is placed face down in the center of the table. The first card is drawn and placed in the discard pile. The first player may choose to take the discarded card or draw a new one from the deck.

### 4 Game Play

Each player’s turn consists of the following steps, starting with the player who won the draw and progressing clockwise around the table: **Maintain, Draw, Train, Attack, Discard.**

#### 4.1 Maintain

Untap any tapped Knights. Promote Candidates into Knights by flipping the training cards face-up and placing the Candidate pips-up upon the cards. Arrange the Knight so that the desired attack power (pips) faces the center of the table and the defense power faces the player. Discard any Special Cards that were only active for the last turn.

#### 4.2 Draw

Replenish the pool of Recruits to two dominos by drawing from the Peasants in the center of the table. The player may look at the Recruits at any time. When there is less than five Peasants left, recycle the player’s graveyards as described in the Setup.

Next, each player must have six cards at the beginning of her turn. A player may draw the top card from the discard pile if it has a value of between two and nine, and any additional cards from the deck to reach six cards. No Special Cards may be drawn from the discard pile.

### 4.3 Train

The Training Cost of a Recruit is equal to the sum of its pips. The cost may be covered using cards of the *same suit* that have face values between 2 and King. Jacks count as 11 points, Queens as 12, and Kings as 13. If Tens, Jacks, Queens, and Kings are used as Training Cards, they lose their abilities as Special Cards.

To train a Recruit, a player must fulfill its training cost in Training Cards. Place the training cards face down in front of the player, and place the Recruit “pips-down” upon the training cards. It is now a Candidate in training.

#### 4.3.1 Optional Rule: Multi-turn Training

*by Gabe Turner*

A player can begin to train a Recruit even if the training cost is not met that turn. Place the training cards face down and the Recruit pips-down as per normal training rules. The player may then add training cards to the Candidate each turn until the cost is met. The Candidate may then be promoted to a Knight in the Maintenance phase of the *following* turn.

### 4.4 Attack

The ultimate objective of any attack is to reduce the opponent’s Kingdom Health Points. The opponent’s objective, therefore is to prevent that from happening. Damage for an attack is either taken by the defending Knights or the Kingdom, but not both. A defender can sacrifice Knights to protect the Kingdom from damage. Unblocked attack points do not carry on to the Kingdom, they are simply lost. Therefore, an attacking player’s objective is to overwhelm the opponent with numbers so that a free Knight can get through the defenses and damage the Kingdom itself.

A player may attack any other player, and she may attack any number of players during her turn. However, each attack must be declared and resolved separately. Additionally, each player may be attacked only once per turn. For example, Alice may attack Bob, resolve, and then attack Charlie. Alice may not attack Bob or Charlie again until her next turn, rather she may only attack Dianne. The attack sequence is as follows: Declare and Commit to the Attack, Aid the Attack, Declare and Commit the Defense, Aid the Defense, Resolve, Clean-up.

#### 4.4.1 Declare and Commit to the Attack

The attacking player must first declare who she is attacking. She then chooses Knights to attack that player by tapping them: turning the Knight upon the card to a 45 degree angle to the right of forward.

#### 4.4.2 Aid in the Attack

The attacking player may ask for aid at this time. Aid is provided by any other player by committing untapped Knights to attack the defending *player*. Aid can be given even if it isn't explicitly asked for, but must be declared before the defending player begins committing Knights to defense.

#### 4.4.3 Declare and Commit to the Defense

The defending player may then choose whether or not to defend. If she does defend, she does so by tapping Knights and indicating which attacking Knight it is defending against. For example by placing the defending Knight directly in front of the attacking Knight. A Knight already tapped before this Attack sequence began may not be used to defend.

Multiple defending Knights may commit to a single attacking Knight. For both attack and defense power, treat the defending Knights as if it were a single Knight, a unit. In order for the attacking Knight to defeat either Knight, it must defeat the unit as a whole.

#### 4.4.4 Aid in the Defense

As with the attacking player, the defending player may ask for aid. Defense aid can be given by other players committing their Knights to a player's defense. Aid may be given, even if the defending player has decided not to commit her own Knights in defense.

There are no rule-based allegiances, and any player may choose to interfere by tapping their own Knights and committing them to attack or defend Kingdoms. Knights providing aid in attack can never act as a unit. To defeat any defensive Knight in a unit, all Knights in the unit must be defeated.

#### 4.4.5 Resolution

All attacks happen simultaneously. To resolve which Knights are victorious, compare the attack power of a Knight to the defense power of the opposing Knight or unit. If the attack is greater than the combined defense, the attack succeeds. If neither attack succeeds, it is considered a tie or push; neither Knight is defeated. If both attacks succeed, both Knights are defeated. All Knights involved remain tapped for the remainder of each player's turn.

If an attack cannot be defended or blocked, its attack power reduces the defending player's Kingdom's Health Points. If the player has no remaining Kingdom Health Points, she is ejected from the game. Discard all cards and place all Knights, Candidates, and Recruits in the player's graveyard.

#### 4.4.6 Clean-up

Flip over any defeated Knights while resolving the attacks and defenses. After resolution is complete, send any defeated Knights to the controlling player's

graveyard stack and discard those Knights' training cards. Discard any special cards no longer in play. Move any Knights that survived the battle back in front of their respective players.

At this point, a player may choose to Attack another or decide to Discard and end her turn.

#### 4.4.7 Optional Rule: Loot the Battfield

The defeated Kingdom's land is absorbed by the opponent, and the *battlefield* may be looted. Any single Knight defeated upon the battlefield can be placed on the top of the victorious player's own graveyard stack. This option counters a game strategy where the defeated player buries stronger Knights below weaker Knights in the graveyard stack, making them unavailable for the Necromancer to raise from the dead.

### 4.5 Discard

A player may not have more than five cards in her hand at the end of her turn, but may discard any number of cards if she so decides. Discard any extra cards face up on the discard pile. A player may also discard any number of cards from her hand.

*Strategy hint: Always place the lowest value card on the top of the discard pile.*

## 5 Special Cards

What fun would any game be without special effects and attack cards? This section details how Aces, the Face Cards, Jokers, and Tens can affect game play. Each of these cards can be played as *instant effect cards*; they can be played at any time. Any number of face cards can be played at once, by any player, and effects can be stacked.

Special cards may not be drawn from the discard pile. They prevent a player from drawing a point card directly below it. Although special cards may be used for points to train Recruits, you may *not* draw the card from the discard pile. When the last card of the deck is drawn, the discard pile is reshuffled and placed as the deck. The top card is not discarded as in the start of the game.

The effects of special cards may "stack" upon each other. To resolve which effects are first in the stack, examine the period in which the cards is active. If they are active during the same time, apply the least powerful card first. If playing with multiple decks, identical cards may also stack upon each other.

### 5.1 The Aces: Instant Gratification

The Aces are the most powerful cards in the deck and can affect any Knight on the board, not simply the player who uses the card.

- **A♠:** (*Instant*) Death. This card instantly kills any single Candidate or Knight in play, whether it is in training (blind kill), tapped or active. Discard after killing the target Knight.
- **A♥:** (*Instant*) Life. This trains a single Knight from the Recruit pool directly into action without requiring training cards. This Knight is never tapped. Can be applied to a tapped Knight in play to untap. Discard after the Knight is defeated.
- **A♦:** (*Instant*) Wealth. Double the value of all training cards in the player's hand during the Training step of a player's turn. Place the card face up on top of or in front Candidates in training. Discard during the Maintenance phase of the player's next turn.
- **A♣:** (*Instant*) Power. This card doubles the attack and defend values for a single Knight in play, including any bonus the player may receive for playing the Jack of the same suit. Discard immediately after this Knight is defeated.

The Death card can be played any time on any Knight in play or being trained. This may be useful in preventing a player from building defenders in her next turn.

The Life card is like having a surprise attacker or defender. It is most impressive when using it to pull a Knight directly from the Recruit pool into play. If used in concert with a Joker (Necromancer), the Knight can be stolen from any player's grave and brought directly in to play. It can also be used on Knights already in play, even those that have already been tapped.

The Wealth card may not seem powerful at first, but some Knights require many points to train. The double nine domino, for example requires 18 points in training cards of the same suit to train. When you play the Wealth card, place it face up either on top of or directly in front of your training Knights. This card can only be disrupted during the Training phase of the player's turn. Once the Training phase has ended and the player has entered Attack or Discard phases, the card is inactive and only remains in front of the player to verify that training costs have been met during the Maintenance phase of her next turn.

The probability for each of these cards to come into play is 1/54.

## 5.2 The Faces: Control Cards

The Face Cards can be played on behalf of any player at the table and remain in effect until the Maintenance phase of that player's next turn. These cards should be placed face up next to the player affected.

- **King:** (*Instant*) Majesty. Knights of the King's suit under the player's control do not need to be tapped to attack or defend.
- **Queen:** (*Instant*) Loyalty. Knights of the Queen's suit may not attack the player who this card effects or Knights the player controls that are of

the same suit. These Knights, in turn, also refuse to fight opponents of the same suit.

- **Jack:** (*Instant*) Courage. Knights of the Jack's suit gain Attack and Defense Bonuses of 1/3 of maximum pip value for the domino set.

The probability that a King, Queen, or Jack will come in to play is 6/27.

### 5.3 Tens and Jokers: Wizards and Necromancers

The two other types of cards left are the Tens and Jokers, the Wizards and Necromancers of the deck. The Tens, the Wizards, are masters of disruption. As instant effect cards, they may negate *any* special card played at any time, including other Wizards. Some instant cards have different periods of effectiveness. For example, the Power card (A♣) stays with the Knight until that Knight is defeated. The Wizard can disrupt that card. The Death card (A♠) has a very short period but deadly period of effectiveness. With the exception of the Wealth card (A◇), any special card that is not in the discard pile already can be disrupted.

The Jokers are the thieving Necromancers of the deck. They may recall and place in a player's Recruit pool the top Knight from *any* player's graveyard stack.

- **Ten:** (*Instant*) Wizard. Negate any special card that has been played or is still in play.
- **Joker:** (*Instant*) Necromancer. Resurrect the top Knight from any player's graveyard stack as a Recruit.

The probability that a Necromancer will come in to play is 1/27. The probability that a Wizard will come in to play is 2/27.

## 6 The Blank Domino: Doppelganger!

The blank domino is the only special domino in a set, the Doppelganger. It has the ability to duplicate any Knight in play of the same suit, including Knights under the control of opponents. It can only duplicate one Knight until either that Knight or the Doppelganger is defeated. If the copied Knight is defeated and the Doppelganger still remains in play, the player must immediately designate another Knight of the same suit for the Doppelganger to copy, or lose it to the graveyard. If there are no Knights of the same suit, the Doppelganger is immediately sent to the graveyard.

*Tip: use a marker or indicator of some kind to indicate the copied Knight, such as a coin or piece of tape.*

Special effects cards that are applied directly to the copied Knight, such as Life (A♥) or Power (A♣), also apply to the Doppelganger. Player affect cards for opponents, such as Majesty(King), Loyalty(Queen), and Courage(Jack) do

not. Lastly, if a special effect card is disrupted with the Wizard(Ten) on the copied Knight, it is also disrupted on the Doppelganger.

If no Knights of the same suit are in play at the time when the Doppelganger completes training and is promoted from Candidate to Knight, it is immediately sent to the graveyard.

## 7 Winning the Game

The goal to winning the game is to be the “last Kingdom standing,” the only player with Kingdom Health Points remaining. Some games can take a long period of time, so setting a time limit is a practical consideration; award the game to the “Healthiest Kingdom after  $T$  minutes.” The goal for your game should be decided during the Setup.

### 7.1 Optional Rule: Kingdom Fame Points

Rather than a game of attrition, where the survival of a Kingdom rests upon its health, Domino Knights can be played instead as a type of tournament, where skill and prowess on the field of battle is awarded with fame.

Instead of giving each Kingdom a high number of Health Points, they are instead awarded a modest number of Fame Points, an average game starting with 10. For each Knight that a player’s Knights defeat, a Kingdom Fame Point is awarded. For each player’s Knight that is defeated, she loses a Kingdom Fame Point. If a pair of defending Knights from different Kingdoms defeats an attacking Knight, such as when one Kingdom is aiding another, each Kingdom receives a Fame Point. The focus of the game is no longer attacking the player, rather defeating opposing Knights.

When a player’s Kingdom has no Fame Points, she is no longer able to recruit Peasants from the countryside to fight in the Tournaments. Knights, Candidates, and Recruits are already committed to the Kingdom and will not abandon it, allowing the player to continue to fight with the potential of winning battles and reclaiming Fame Points.

When a player no longer has Kingdom Fame Points, Knights, Candidates, or Recruits, she is ejected from the game.

This new focus influences the goal game in a couple ways. A “last Kingdom standing” style game can drag on forever, making it an impractical goal. Instead, a better goal may be “first Kingdom with  $N$  Fame Points” or “the Kingdom with the most Fame points after  $T$  minutes”. An appropriate value for  $N$  may be 30 or 50 points, and an appropriate value for  $T$  is probably 60 or more minutes.

### 7.2 Optional Rule: Random Goal

*by Gabe Turner*

Take the victory scenarios above and make them random. At the beginning of the game, a card is flipped over to determine the victory scenario. ♣ for last player standing; ♦ for first to reach  $N$  Fame Points; ♥ for most fame points after  $T$  minutes; ♠ for last player standing with non-increasing fame points (attrition); Jokers for whatever the group thinks appropriate - each player allowed to argue why her favorite scenario is the best - or a redraw.

All that remains is determining what  $N$  is, where applicable.

## 8 Optional Rule: Domino-less Game

It is still possible to play Domino Knights without a set of dominos; the mechanics of the game change slightly. The Peasents and Recruits are removed from the game. Candidates and Knights are represented by a pair of cards of the same suit, one indicating the attack and one indicating the defense. Stack the defense card upon the attack card, so that the attack values can still be seen.

As with dominos, the player does not need to assign the assign to attack and defense powers until the Maintenance phase of the next turn.

Life(A♥) no longer gives the player the “no cost” benefit of playing it upon a domino, but a Knight may still be brought directly into play from the player’s hand, and it never is tapped.

The A♦ is the card most affected by this optional rule. One idea is to use this as a Mercenary card, allowing a player to purchase the loyalties of any Knight on the board. The Mercenary card would be placed under the Knight and if disrupted, the Knight would return to its original owner.

The Doppelganger is also generally not represented in a standard deck of cards. Some decks actually come with a blank card, and some come with a card containing the rules for poker on it. With the change to the A♦ card, it may not be necessary.

The graveyard stack mechanism also changes. A player only needs to keep the last Knight defeated as a pair of face-up cards, turned horizontally (so as to distinguish it from tapped or untapped Knights). Other defeated Knights are discarded immediately. The graveyard stack can also be eliminated if the Necromancer card is only allowed to act upon defeated Knights on the battle field, before the cleanup phase of battle.

## A This Document

This document was created using L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X and the ViM text editor. If you find errors in this document or have suggestions on how to improve it, please send email to Chad C. Walstrom at <[chewie@wookimus.net](mailto:chewie@wookimus.net)>.

The latest version of this document can be found at <http://wookimus.net/~chewie/domino-knights/> in PDF format or a tarball of the original source code.

### A.1 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Monday night gaming group for helping play test the initial versions of the game: Josh Sheppard, Marya Brendle, and John Lindquist. I would also like to thank Gabe Turner, who proved that it helps to have a fresh set of eyes to tackle some of the more sticky details of editing and for bringing fresh ideas to the table.

### A.2 Changes

- v0.8 - Layout cleanup. Clarification of phases. Addressed change to graveyard stack mechanism in domino-less game. Added Terminology and Acknowledgements sections. Added Optional Rule section for Fluctuating Kingdom Fame Points and Gabe's Random Goal section.
- v0.7 - Domino-less game option. (Thanks for the suggestion, Gabe!)
- v0.6 - Copyright and License Update.
- v0.5 - Terms Update: Change spawn and creature terminology to Peasants, Recruits, Candidates, Knights, and Training. Handled case where no Knights of the same suit exist when the Doppelganger is promoted from Candidate to Knight.
- v0.4 - Swapped the 10's, now the disrupters, and Jokers, the thieves. Clarified the Wealth card and Disruption card semantics.
- v0.3 - Added the Doppelganger!
- v0.2 - Created spawn pool mechanism. Require Knight card values equal to pips. Fixed typos.
- v0.1 - Initial incarnation of death, destruction, and mayhem!

### A.3 TODO

- Edit: Cleanup layout, add epigraphs, etc.
- Section: Glossary. Place at front just after introduction.
- Appendix: Crib Sheets. A 4x5.5 double-sided crib sheet that can be printed four to a page would be perfect.

- Appendix: Score Sheets.
- Appendix: Index.
- Graphic: Cover art. Deck of cards, dominos, Aristocrat, Death, Cleric, and Barbarian
- Graphic: Example of a table layout
- Graphic: Example of the player's space layout
- Graphic: Domino on card, tapped for battle
- Graphic: Death and A♠
- Graphic: Female cleric and A♥
- Graphic: Jeweled Aristocrat and A♦
- Graphic: Wood Berzerker/Barbarian and A♣
- Graphic: Necromancer
- Graphic: Mage

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