Joe Sopko Designer

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Game Design Document

UNFINISHED REFERENCE GAM200 GDD OUTLINE

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# Introduction

*►NOTE: Kingdoms was designed to achieve the Challenge aesthetic. Prepare yourself for competition.*

*►GAME TIP: Try building your kingdoms in quadrilateral shapes, that way they are harder to break up.*

**Kingdoms** is a spatially constructive card game with a focus on strategy and hidden information. The game is best played with three to four players, but can be learned with two. The general objective of the game is to get the largest contiguous group of your suit or **Kingdom**.

# Player Objective

Create the most “powerful” contiguous kingdom in the realm.

 **1 2**

 **3 4**

 **5**

Figure 1.1 Spades win with five power points.

# Score System

Numerical cards or **towns** of your suit provide one power point.

Face cards or **castles** of any suit act as wild cards and provide one power point. Players receive an additional power point for each castle of their suit in a kingdom they control.

**Castled** **King:** If a player surrounds the **king** of his or her suit with towns of the same suit, that player receives an additional power point for each of the four towns and the king, for a total of five power points.

# Setting Up

Take all the Aces in the deck and shuffle them, then give each player one and put the rest to the side. Take the rest of the deck of cards, shuffle them, and give player a hand of two cards. Finally take the remaining deck of cards and put them in the center of all players. Each player’s ace card represents their suit they use to build their Kingdom.

# How to Play

*►GAME TIP: Try tricking your opponents into thinking you’re another suit.*

Starting with the dealer each player takes their turn one at a time, with turn order progressing clockwise. Each turn, a player may place or play up to two cards from his or her hand. At the end of the turn, he or she draws cards until he or she has two cards in hand.

## Placing Cards

Cards may only be placed in the realm on spaces orthogonally adjacent to the deck or an already placed card. When placing a card, the player placing the card may choose to place it face up or face down.

## Playing Cards

When a player plays a card, he or she sets it down face up in front of them and declares which power he or she is using. After a card is played it is discarded at the end of the turn. Each card rank has a different power, as denoted below:

**2, 3**: Look at one face down card in the realm.

**4, 5, 6**: Look at two face down cards in the realm.

**7, 8, 9**: Look at three face down cards in the realm.

**10**: Look at four face down cards in the realm.

**Face card powers continue on the next page. . .**

## Playing Cards (Cont.)

**J, Q, K**: Choose one –

*(Remove)* Take one card in the realm and put it into your hand or send it to the graveyard;

*(Recover)* Take two cards from the graveyard and put them into your hand;

*(Reveal)* Look at up to five cards in the realm, then reveal three of those cards (turn them face up).

## The Graveyard

The discard pile or the **graveyard** should be laid out in such a way that its contents are visible to all players at all times. When a card is sent to the graveyard, it should be placed on the top.

## Ending the Game

The game ends either when a player would take their second consecutive turn or when no players have cards in their hands. When the game ends, all cards in the realm are revealed and power points are calculated to declare the winner!

# Playtesting Results and Analysis

*►GAME TIP: Use the Remove power of face cards to break up opponent’s kingdoms.*

The first session of playtesting went well and was played with four players. The rules were designed more party oriented or luck-based due to the rule that cards are worth their listed value on the card rather than one point per card. This heavy emphasis on chance generated sporadic spikes in the interest curve per player whenever they would draw high value cards. Another mechanic that aided in the fun party atmosphere was the **Declare Victory** mechanic that allowed any player to stop play as long as the Realm contained at least 12 cards and no one else has declared victory yet. The player would then turn all the cards face up and then either flip his Ace Card if he won, or do nothing and leave the game if he lost. From there the game would continue with all the cards face up and one less player, only ending when the deck was exhausted. When

# Playtesting Results and Analysis (Cont.)

this occurred in one of the games it led to a great spike in the interest curve as cards were flipped over and points were tallied. The player who initiated the declare victory lost and the game continued, allowing the interest curve to continue high due to temporary obliteration of hidden information. The interest curve then tapered off, and then spiked again at the end of the game as normal. Feedback was positive, however winners were often a product of chance rather than intelligent play. Although the game was fun, I wanted to pursue the Challenge aesthetic and more mechanical depth thus leading me to the current scoring system and removal of the Declare Victory due to being difficult to balance. The entirety of playtesting and development I really wanted to bring the Declare Victory mechanic back, but never found a way to without changing the spirit of it. It essentially functioned as this big red button that anyone could press at any time, either potentially ending the game in their favor or irreparably changing the flow of the game.

After the initial playtesting I continued to personally playtest and observe others playtest daily for nearly a week, ensuring the game was playable and fun with 2-4 players. Slight changes were introduced nearly every playtest, constantly making it more of a deep competitive strategy game. Slight alterations in how many actions a player can take in a turn, and whether or not they are forced to do anything in particular every turn was tuned for balance and allowing for a variety of play styles. Face cards were given the wildcard ability where they provided points for any Kingdom rather than solely their listed suit. This change encouraged more player interaction and Kingdom entanglement opposed to players simply building away from one another and then using off suit cards to occasionally block each other. Face cards abilities required balancing between the three options as recovering two cards was consistently part of optimal play and recovering one card was uninteresting. Buffing the other two options involved too complex of rules to memorize and I hit a design wall. I struggled to keep the game accessible with simpler memorable rules while still adding depth. I found myself wanting to make reference cards for players that explained their available actions or other rules, but recognized that was outside the given parameters for the application.

# Playtesting Results and Analysis (Cont.)

My current conclusion and lesson learned from the development cycle of Kingdoms is that the French card deck is fantastic for rapidly iterating, but is a little difficult to utilize to achieve the Challenge aesthetic and remain reasonably accessible. I believe the difficulty is caused by two things. First, the mechanic of having a shuffled deck that players draw from is inherently chance based, therefore introducing asymmetry that is difficult to balance and second, the rules needing to be memorized made accessibility and designing for depth difficult. If I were to continue development I would try to find different ways of replacing the draw/deck mechanic, although it is conventional and I imagine any changes would be experimental and mostly shots in the dark until playtested. Another interesting find include the observation that players’ spatial memory was significantly improved when the deck of cards had four different suit colors rather than the traditional black and red. Overall I’m pleased with the exercise and end product and would love any feedback or suggestions, please e-mail me any thoughts!