

Defenders

This game is about a siege. A great city is under attack by a powerful enemy. We play to find out how the city stands or falls. It isn't quite a war game - while you have some ability to influence the outcome, there's a large element of chance - rather, it's about telling the story of this mighty battle, and what happens to the defenders. You'll describe the hue and cry of battle, the fears and hopes of the defenders, and their final actions as they fall or drive the enemy back.

This is a game where the players work together against the menace, and against a "virtual GM": A deck of cards generates and controls threats. Everybody draws on a map to sketch out the location, plays the (roughly sketched) characters fighting against the incoming threat.

You play to find out if you can somehow stop the menace, and how many of the defenders will make it out alive... somehow.

What do you need?

In order to play you'll need:

- A few sheets where you'll draw a map and take notes about the setting, the characters and the story
- A deck of 52 cards
- Dice - a d4, a d6 and a d8 should be sufficient.
- Pencil and eraser

Setup

World building

Decide together in which setting you want to play. By default, you will protect a town in a medieval fantasy setting, and the characters will be knights, priests, mages. But several other settings can be chosen instead of this one:

- Will you defend a modern city attacked by several Kaijū with giants mechas?
- Will you protect an industrial steam-punk city against the forces of Nature led by a werewolf druidess?
- Will you patrol the Core Sectors of the Terran Consortium, facing vicious alien fleets?
- Will you survive the zombie apocalypse in your refugee camp?
- Will you, great superheroes or powerful mutants, fight back an alien invasion, trying to tear apart our reality?

Card value

At times the rules will tell you to refer to card value. The card value is the same as its face value. Jacks count as 11, Queens as 12, Kings as 13 and Aces as 1. For cards of the same value, Clubs are considered highest, followed by Diamonds, Hearts and Spades.

City creation

Draw 12 cards initially. Take turns, going round the table. On your turn you can:

- Choose a card and play it to create a new location or defender, then draw a new card; or
- Choose a card and play it on an existing location or defender, then draw a new card; or
- Finalise a location or defender that has had at least 2 cards played on it, describing it in more detail using the type(s) and descriptor(s) played on it, giving it a name and putting the finished stack of cards in front of you, separate from any others you've collected. Note down the face values and suits that were played on it. No further cards may be added to this location/defender.

When you play a card in the city, either:

- Assign ONE type of location/defender based on the face value of the card. For example, you could play a 6 to create an armoury.
- Assign ONE descriptor to the location/defender based on the face value of the card. For example, you could play a club to make a location well-constructed.

You can do these in either order, and a location or defender can have any number of cards played on it.

Once you have at least 6 locations and 6 defenders that have been finalised and named, anyone can skip their turn. If everyone skips their turn, the location creation process is over. Once 12 locations have been created (not necessarily finalised), or if you run out of cards, you may not create any more. The same applies to defenders.

Locations

Face values

Ace, 2, 3, 4, 5 - a broad area of the city. A neighbourhood, a marketplace, a park, a thoroughfare, walls.

6-10 - a military building. Barracks, armoury, watchtower, gatehouse, fortress.

J - an economy-related building. A bank, bazaar, workshop, warehouse, mine, factory.

Q - a religious building. A temple, shrine, holy site, home of a high-ranking priest.

K - a government building. A palace, embassy, court, police station.

Suits

Diamonds - newly-built, attractive, high-status, famous, important, highly-visible, of good reputation.

Hearts - popular, loved, symbol of hope, thriving, busy, central, hub, vital.

Clubs - feared, hated, corrupt, imposing, well-constructed, powerful.

Spades - secret, hidden, underground, obscure, damaged, run-down, abandoned, unassuming.

Defenders

Face values

Ace, 2, 3, 4, 5 - a non-military group of some sort. Spellcasters. Engineers. Healers. Untrained fighters.

6-10 - a military regiment. Riders. Archers. Foot-soldiers. Scouts.

J - An individual who can inspire. A priest. A general. A noble or royal. A philosopher or poet.

Q - An individual who can fight. A paladin. A gladiator. A knight. A mercenary. A war-wizard.

K - A war machine(s). Trebuchet. Scorpion. Ballista. Cannon. (Counts as an individual.)

Suits

Diamonds - young, attractive, high-status, famous, important, of good reputation, socially connected.

Hearts - popular, loved, symbol of hope, charismatic, mobile, tough, numerous.

Clubs - feared, hated, corrupt, big, strong, violent, bloodthirsty.

Spades - stealthy, covert-ops, clever, manipulative, subtle, unassuming, ragged, of low birth, criminal.

Finishing off the city

You're now going to draw a map of the city. You'll draw each location on a piece of paper. The player who finalised a location is responsible for choosing where it goes, and for drawing it on the map. **You have to actually draw it.** Don't worry if you think your drawing looks terrible,

that is not important. When you're drawing your location, feel free to add in little twiddly details, like towers on your wall or a massive statue outside your temple. Also, if you need to add on other geographical features to ensure your location makes sense - like the steep mountainside against which the city wall terminates - then do so.

The order in which locations are drawn on is described below. Where there's more than one location of the same kind, start with the location with the highest value (see page [1]).

For secret, hidden or underground locations, ignore the order below. Underground locations are always drawn on last, using dotted lines.

Start off by drawing on major natural features. You haven't generated these and they don't count as locations (cannot be occupied by units). They are just there to make the city look and feel real.

After that, place locations that are long and thin, like a road or walls. If a road crosses a river, draw on a ford or bridge. If a wall crosses a road, draw on a gate.

Next, draw any other broad areas, like districts. These can be inside or outside the arc of a wall or river, right next to another location or off on its own.

Now draw on any smaller locations. You can put them inside larger areas like a district, or immediately adjacent to them.

After that, establish any connections between locations. A connection between two locations means units can move between them. By default, locations adjacent to (or under!) each other are connected, except for rivers, which form a barrier, and walls, which are considered to be connected to locations on the inside of the wall, and unconnected to locations on the outside. If you think there are any adjacent locations that should break these defaults, add a connection by drawing a little double-headed arrow between the two, remove one by drawing an X between the two. If there are gaps between locations, consider adding a connection to join them up; draw these as a dashed line.

Finally, note which locations are entry-points, i.e. accessible from the outside of the city. Draw an arrow pointing from those locations to the edge of the map. Give each one a number. When the game asks you to select a random entry point, roll an appropriately-sized die to pick the number of the entry point. In some cases, you won't need to roll at all; if, for instance, the entire city is surrounded by a wall. In others, you may need to roll a die of a higher size than the number of locations available (for instance, if there are seven entry points, you'd have to roll a d8); if so, re-roll any result that doesn't come up with an applicable number.

If an entry-point is destroyed or occupied during play, that may change the number of entry-points. For instance, if a wall that completely surrounds the city is destroyed or occupied, all the

locations immediately inside the walls become entry-points. When this happens, pause to reassign numbers.

Placing the defenders

You need a unique token for each defender. You could use a miniature figure, a chess piece, a bit of card with a number on it... anything, as long as it can be distinguished from the others.

Place defenders in the city starting with the highest card value assigned to them. You may not place more than one regiment in a small location, and you may not place more than two on an area location. You may place non-combat groups and individual defenders freely.

Threat creation

Reshuffle all the cards together into a threat deck:

- Take all the cards and shuffle them together
- Deal out twelve cards into a stack, face down, add a joker to them, and then shuffle them together.
- Put the rest of the deck on top.

Take turns to draw and play a threat. Draw as many threats as you have defenders. Ignore the suit: only the face value matters. When you play your threat, describe it, place it outside the city (no specific location) and give it a name.

Like defenders, threats are represented by a unique token.

Face Values

Ace, 2, 3, 4, 5 - a rabble or horde. Goblins. Undead soldiers. Giant rats.

6-10 - a military regiment. Riders. Archers. Foot-soldiers. Scouts.

J - Something that can infiltrate or terrify. A wraith. A serpent. Giant spiders. Shapeshifters.

Q - Something lethal. A champion. A sorcerer. An assassin.

K - Something massive and destructive. Trebuchet. Scorpion. Ballista. Cannon. A war elephant. A giant.

Game play

The game runs in turns. On each turn you go through three steps, in order. On every turn one player is the First Player, which just means that when the players take turns to do something, they go first. If the game calls to do something in the Normal Order, that means start with the First Player and go clockwise around the table. At the beginning of every new turn, the person seated to clockwise from the old First Player becomes the new First Player.

1. Reflection.
2. Threats act.
3. Defenders act.

Reflection

At the end of each turn, the First Player frames a scene focused on the emotions of the inhabitants of the city.

You do not need to worry overly about the positions of units on the map at this point; assume that individuals may move around, returning to their posts after the reflection step. So even though two individuals may be positioned at different sides of the map, they may interact in a scene if you wish.

When you frame a scene, name the characters you want in, say where it's happening, when it's happening and what is happening, and then assign players to take on each role. You do not need to play one yourself if you don't want to. Pick people who you think will enjoy the role or do a good job of it. Then play out the scene.

These are mostly conversations, so you will mostly be speaking for your character and describing how they act, what emotions they project. That's not to say you can't have action - you could have a brawl, lovemaking or gambling. These are just ways of creating drama, though. We don't use rules to decide who wins the brawl. Where you're interested in the outcome of some action, try to agree what should happen based on what seems most interesting, fun or plausible. If you can't agree, go for an outcome which is bad for the characters concerned; like, a brawl ends up with everyone bruised and battered with no clear winner.

There are a wide variety of possible scenes; here are a few:

- Reveal and develop relationships between individual characters, either the leaders you created during set up, or ordinary members of the defence force. Portray everyday aspects of their existence during the siege. Make us care about them, so it matters whether they live or die. When you do this, you may be creating new characters from whole cloth: give them a name, decide on a personality, think about what is preoccupying them - have they left loved ones at home, what are their hopes and fears. Reveal this generously through their speech and actions. It is very dull if the characters hide their inner thoughts and feelings!

- Frame strategic and tactical discussions between leaders sharing, through them, your thoughts about the battle ahead. You aren't permitted to discuss tactics during the other phases, so this is your opportunity to agree how you'll handle the next turn.
- If a unit has been destroyed, you could focus on the reaction of loved ones. Frame a funeral, or a posthumous ceremony honouring the unit's heroism.
- If the enemy have won a victory, you could focus on the reaction of the rank and file defenders, or the consternation of the leaders.
- If a location that is high-status, famous, important, of good reputation, popular, loved, symbol of hope, thriving, busy, central, hub, or vital is destroyed or captured, frame the reaction to that.
- If a location or character that is feared or hated is killed/destroyed/overrun, there will be mixed feelings that could feed a great scene.
- If the enemy have been repulsed, you could focus on celebrations.

Your first reflection step will doubtless be a mix of the first two options, setting up some relationships and plans as the enemy masses outside the gate.

No conferring

During the next two steps (threats act and defenders act), you may not discuss your strategy and tactics. The rules will tell you whose job it is to make each move; it is up to them to make the decision without any advice from the others. Trying to communicate with another player to tell them what they should do is cheating!

Threats act

The First Player draws and plays a card from the threat deck.

- If you draw a heart, place it in the reserve stack. These represent reinforcements that are on their way to help defend the city.
- If you draw a diamond, a special event occurs.
- If you draw a spade, add it to the threats arrayed against the city, creating it and describing it exactly as during threat creation.
- If you draw a club, some of the threats attack the city.
- If you draw the joker, reinforcements arrive, and all the threats attack.

Special events

When you draw a diamond, a special event occurs.

- On an Ace, 2 or 3, the enemy gathers intelligence on the city. The next time an attack is triggered, don't roll the dice to decide where the first threat attacks. Instead, select the most powerful threat that is attacking, and choose a location for it to attack, as follows:

- If possible, choose a location where the strongest defender is weaker (lower card value) than that threat; if more than one location fits, choose the one whose strongest defender has a higher card value than the rest.
- Otherwise, choose the location whose strongest defender has the lowest card value compared to the other locations.
- On a 4, 5 or 6, the enemy poisons water supplies, steals equipment, and sows discord. Inflict 1 morale damage on the city.
- On a 7-10, the enemy springs a surprise attack! Trigger an attack as though you had drawn a Club, but don't roll the dice to decide which threats attack: all threats with a face value equal to the card drawn attack - or if there aren't any, choose those with the closest available face value. Skip the part where individual defenders move.
- When a Face Card is drawn, a random Face Card threat is activated:
 - Jacks sow terror. When you activate a Jack's ability, describe how the threat infiltrates the city and causes chaos. Inflict 2 morale damage on the city.
 - Queens target important defenders and eliminate them. When you activate a Queen's ability, select a random Face card defender. Describe how the threat targets them, and how they defend themselves. Roll a die for the threat and a die for the defender: if the threat rolls equal or greater, the defender is eliminated (probably dead, but could be captured, sent to another dimension, etc). If the defender rolls greater, the threat is driven off. For now.
 - Kings wreak terrible destruction on the city. Select a location at random and destroy it. Any defenders are wounded, and must move to another location following the usual rules. Describe the destruction and terror, and edit the location on the map to show how it has been ruined.

The attack

When you draw a club, roll a d6. On a 1-2, threat cards with a face value lower than the club drawn attack the city. On a 5-6, threat cards with a face value higher than the club drawn attack the city. On a 3-4, threat cards with a face value equal to the club drawn attack the city.

When the threats attack, the First Player rolls a random entry-point for the first threat attacking. Roll a d6 for each subsequent threat; on a 4-6, it attacks the same location as the previous threat, on a 1-3 roll a new entry-point. (If you get the same entry-point as before, it attacks the same location after all!)

After you've placed all attacking threats, each player may move one individual defender (i.e. not a group or unit) from their current location into an adjacent one, in the Normal Order.

If you drew the Joker, all threats attack. Roll for entry-points as usual. However, once all threats have been assigned, as well as moving individual defenders, all cards built up in the reinforcements stack are assigned to join the battle. The players take turns in the Normal Order to assign one reinforcement unit until they have all been assigned. You may assign

reinforcement regiments to locations that already contain defending regiments, as they pile in from behind enemy lines. Once you've assigned reinforcements you work out the results of the battle as usual.

Once any defenders have been moved, determine the results of the attacks. The First Player chooses a location that is under attack and:

1. The First Player describes how the threat attacks. When describing a threat's attack, put your heart and soul into it; make it vicious and bloody, and don't hold back. When a player describes an attack in an underwhelming way, other players should groan loudly, say "weak sauce", or throw popcorn.
2. The player to the First Player's left describes how the defenders in the attacked location defend themselves. If you can't come up with a description that makes sense, the defenders lose and are destroyed. If you manage a suitable description, the battle is on!
3. Assuming the defenders weren't automatically destroyed, work out the results of the battle.
 - A. Work out the defenders' total strength:
 - Add together the card values of any group or regiment defenders.
 - Add +1 for each defender that is tough, numerous, big, strong, violent or bloodthirsty.
 - Add +1 if they're defending a military building, if the location is well-constructed, or if it's underground.
 - Modifiers are cumulative, even if one defender or location has more than one relevant characteristic.
 - If a Queen defender is present, roll a d6 and add it as a bonus.
 - Finally, roll a d6 and add it as a bonus.
 - B. Work out the threats' total strength:
 - Add together the card values of any rabble, horde or regiment.
 - If a Face Card threat is present, roll a d6 and add it as a bonus. However, do not roll for Jack or King threats if there is a defender of the same face value at the location.
 - Finally, roll a d6 and add it as a bonus.
 - C. If the defenders have the higher total, they repulse the attack.
 - Starting with the current player and rotating clockwise, each player selects a defender from those present (including Jacks and Kings), chooses a threat with an equal or lower card value than it, and destroys that threat. They also describe how each threat is vanquished.
 - Continue until all defenders have destroyed a threat or until all remaining threats have a higher card value than all remaining defenders.
 - All remaining threats (if any) return to wherever they were before the attack began. Defenders remain at the location of the battle.
 - If the arrival of reinforcements mean there are multiple regiments in a location, move the excess units to nearby locations exactly as though you were moving them during the "defenders act" step.
 - D. If the threats have the higher total, they defeat the defenders.
 - First, any King defenders are automatically destroyed as they are too slow to flee.

- Then, if there are any Jack defenders present, they may choose one other defender and declare it immune from destruction in this battle. Say how the Jack defender leads their charge to safety.
- Finally, starting with the current player and rotating clockwise, each player selects a threat from those present, chooses a defender with an equal or lower card value than it, and destroys that defender. They also describe how the defender goes down, and any final heroics they display before dying.
- All remaining defenders (if any) are wounded and flee to a connected location. It may be that a regiment cannot flee, because all connected locations already contain a regiment; if so, they too are destroyed. Similarly the arrival of reinforcements might mean that several regiments are all forced to flee to one location - if so only one survives.
- Threats remain at the location of the battle, which is now considered occupied; you must therefore work out the entry-points to the city anew.

Morale and wounds

Wounded units count as having a card value 1 point lower. A unit can be wounded more than once, and the effects are cumulative.

Morale damage has the same effect, but applied to *all* units in the city (both regiments, groups and individual). Likewise, it can stack up and the effects are cumulative with itself and with wounds.

Morale damage can be taken if a diamond is drawn from the threat deck. However, in addition, a point of morale damage is taken any time:

- A building is destroyed or occupied that is newly-built, attractive, high-status, famous, important, highly-visible, of good reputation, popular, loved, symbol of hope, thriving, busy, central, hub or vital. Repairing the building or recapturing it reverses the effect.
- A unit is killed that is young, attractive, high-status, famous, important, of good reputation, socially connected, popular, loved, symbol of hope, charismatic, tough, numerous, big, strong, violent or bloodthirsty.

No unit can ever have a negative card value, but can have a zero card value.

Defenders Act

Each player may move one friendly unit (group, regiment, individual) from their current location to a connected location in the Normal Order (you may move mobile units twice). When moving a regiment into a location which already contains a regiment, you may temporarily break the rule which prevents two regiments to occupy the same location. You may not have three regiments in one location, that would just be silly.

Once all players have taken a move or declined to do so, you must take additional moves to ensure that no locations contain two regiments. Move the original occupant of the location (i.e. the one that was not moved there this turn). They move to an unoccupied connected location if that's possible. If not, identify the nearest unoccupied location (by the number of moves it would take to get there); then move the chain of units along the shortest path to that location, each bumping the next on one location.

Finally, the First Player chooses one unit to activate. The unit's special ability (if any) is applied. Unit special abilities are as follows:

- Engineers can repair a ruined location. Roll a d6: on a 4+ the location is sufficiently repaired that units can enter it again.
- Healers can heal the wounded. Roll a d6 for each wounded unit: on a 4+ erase their wounds. If a unit has been wounded more than once, you only erase one set of wounds.
- Jacks can improve morale. Roll a d6: on a 4+ reduce morale damage by 1.
- Kings can attack an enemy unit from a distance. Roll a d6 for the King, a d6 for the threat. If the King rolls equal or higher, the threat is destroyed.

Endgame

If all the defenders (not counting reinforcements that haven't arrived yet) die, the game ends with the enemy victorious.

If all the threats are destroyed, the game ends with the defenders victorious.

If you run out of cards in the threat deck, the defenders win.

Each player narrates a final epilogue scene describing the aftermath of the siege.