

# The Anarchy

This game is a hobby project of mine (Robert Laing [robert.joeblog@gmail.com](mailto:robert.joeblog@gmail.com)) inspired by William Dalrymple's book *The Anarchy — The Relentless Rise of the East India Company*.

It started out as a *print and play* idea, and the many pdfs required can be downloaded from Google drive via links I've put at <https://poopsheet.co.za/games/anarchy/>

## Overview

Two to six players take on the roles of European East India Companies circa 1740. The winner is whoever extracts ₹20 or more from India at the end of a turn. This is achieved by installing puppet governments via political coups and wars rather than trading.

## Components



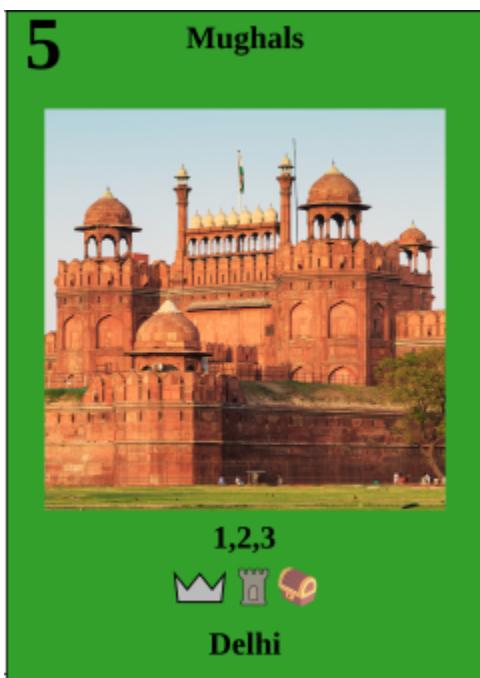
## Board

The board is a political area map of India circa 1740. Each area on the map has a corresponding card suit identified by the background colour and name on top for clarity.

## Cards

There are 126 cards split into 16 suits, each with a background colour and name corresponding to an area on the board. Each card represents a place, leader, army, or commodity within a given area which when melded together represent an area's political strength (crown symbols), defence strength (castles), attack or defence strength (swords), and economic strength (treasure chests).

## Place Cards



The above card has a number in the top left corner, meaning it has political power and can therefore be used as the top card in a meld.

The list of numbers below the picture are the leaders the card will follow, ie can be melded to. A big problem various areas had in this history was lots of leaders but scarce followers, which this game attempts to simulate. So typically the longer the list of leaders a card is willing to follow, the more valuable it is.

The above card's one crown symbol makes it valuable for coups.

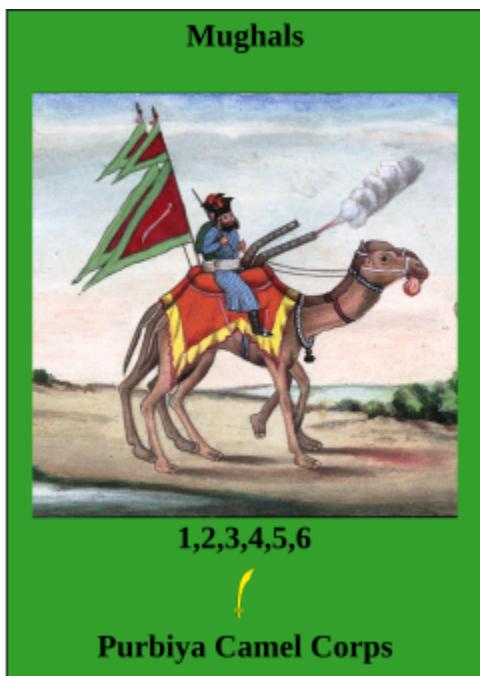
Its castle symbol gives it one defence value, but no attack value, in the war phase. It has one treasure symbol, so it pays if melded ₹1 to its owner at the end of each turn and counts towards the victory condition.

## Leader Cards



The above example shows Imad-ul-Mulk, an evil Grand Vizier and notorious kingmaker. There is no list of numbers under his picture, meaning he can only be used as a leader. Spoiler alert, he has few followers, making any government he leads (ie meld this card heads) prone to coups.

## Army Cards



This card has no leader number or crown, so can only be used as a follower in a meld.

Its sword symbol means it can be used in attacks against neighbouring areas in the war phase of a player's turn. It also helps defend if its area is attacked.  
Military units typically follow any leader.

## Commodity Cards



These cards just have a treasure chest symbol, but no political or military power. They typically follow any leader, and have to be added in a meld to a leading card with a crown symbol.

## Tokens

Each player picks one of the six piles of round tokens showing the historical logos of various East India Companies. There are no variable player powers in this game, so the choice is purely aesthetic.

A pile of tokens, one token per player in the game, is shuffled to randomize player turn order each round.

## Money

Players need money to buy extra cards at the beginning of each turn, and to help win battles. Money is represented by cards to enable *simultaneous bidding* in the war phase. Each player takes a blank money card to play when they don't intend committing any money to a battle.

## Setup



1. Each player chooses an East India Company and takes its pile of tokens. In Tabletopia, I find it easiest to draw one token to the hand as a reminder which colour represents which East India Company and move the rest to whichever area on the table that colour player is using.
2. A pile of face down tokens with one for each player is needed for the random turn order.
3. Shuffle the cards and each player draws 10 cards.
4. The top card in the deck is taken and turned face-up to start the discard pile.
5. Each player starts with ₹10. The money in a player's hand can be broken into change by exchanging with the bank anytime.
6. Each player takes a blank money card, the face-down pile of money cards, which they play every time they don't intend to contribute money to a battle.

## Turns

The order of players in a round is decided randomly by the shuffled pile of tokens. After a round when all the turned down tokens are face-up on the discard pile, turn them over and reshuffle. Flip the top token over and that player goes through the following phases:

1. Pay for extra cards
2. Draw cards
3. Meld cards
4. Discard a card
5. Make war
6. Income

## Pay for extra cards

A player may choose to pay the bank to draw extra cards which get increasingly more expensive. The first extra card costs ₹1, the second ₹2, the third ₹3 etc. The total cost is the cumulative sum.

If a player wants a card lower down in the discard pile, he may examine it to count how many cards he needs to buy to get it, taking all those cards to his hand.

Here's a table to simplify the arithmetic:

Cards	Price
1	Free
2	₹1
3	₹3
4	₹6
5	₹10
6	₹15
7	₹21
8	₹28
9	₹36
10	₹45

## Draw cards

Players have to pay the bank for extra cards before drawing. The player draws the number of cards paid for, taking each card to their hand from the face-down stock pile or the face-up discard pile as desired and available.



The Dutch East India Company player purple is drawn to start the game. He pays the bank ₹6 to draw four cards, getting ₹4 change. One at a time, he draws face-down cards from the stock. The third card is Mughals leader Zabita Khan who the starting discard card, the Rohillas fighters, will follow. So he opts to draw that as his fourth card.

## Meld Cards

Assuming no other player has a meld with a corresponding token on an area, you simply establish a puppet-government there by placing a meld of face-up cards in front of you.

A meld has to have a leader (card with a crown symbol and top left number) which represents the ruling power of an area: its nawab, nizam, khan or what-have-you. Cards of the same area follow that leader if the leader's number in its top left corner appears in the list of numbers below a card's picture.

As cards are melded to their leader, slide them below the leader's card from the bottom so that you can read the important information on the melded cards: the list of leaders the card follows so other players can see it's a legal meld, along with crowns, swords, castles, and treasure chests.

The idea is to build an orderly file arranged below the leader. This is a bit tricky with the Tabletopia version since it tends to highlight the lower card in orange and then stack them on each other.

A meld can consist of just one card provided it has at least one crown on it.

A player may add cards from his hand to his previously placed melds during this phase, possibly changing leaders which may require him to take cards back to his hand if they don't follow the new leader.

You don't have to meld every card that can be melded. Sometimes it's wiser to save a few cards in reserve, especially if they have crowns. A lot of the game's strategy involves deciding which cards to meld and which cards to save.



Back to the first turn of the starting player, he forms one legal meld of two cards and two single card melds which are legal because both have a crown and top-left ID number. He ends this phase with three melds, allowing him to place three VOC tokens on the board in their corresponding areas.

If another player controls an area, when you place a meld it represents an alternative government attempting a coup.

Political coups

To attempt a political coup, create an alternative government by placing a legal meld with more crowns than that area's existing government. The defending player responds by adding any cards from their hand that can be legally melded to their leader on the table.

For the coup to succeed, you have to still have more crowns in your meld than your opponent after they added cards.

The winner takes the opponent's meld and creates a new government, taking any cards that can't be melded into their hand.

If your coup succeeded, replace the area control marker on the board with yours.



Portuguese player green is drawn to go third in the first round. He lays down a legal Mughals meld with three crowns, beating the incumbent government of the Dutch player purple who only has one crown.

If the Dutch player had cards in his hand which he could lay down to match the coup's meld, he could thwart the coup and capture the cards. But he doesn't, so he loses his cards to green.



Neither Zabita Khan nor the Rohillas will follow Shah Alam, so these can't be used in the new government. Green takes them to his hand, joining Imad-ul-Mulk who also won't join a meld headed by Shah Alam.

## Discard a card

You have to discard one card from your hand.

If your hand is empty, one of your melded cards has to be discarded.



The VOC player has two Carnatic leaders who can't be melded, so discards one of them.

## Make war

One area you control may attempt to take a neighbouring area controlled by another player.

The basic attack value is the number of swords in the attacking meld. The defence value is the number of swords plus castles in the defender's meld. The attacking meld has to have more swords than the defending meld's swords plus castles.

As with coups, the defender may add cards from their hand after you have announced your attack.

Money played a bigger part in battles than soldiers in this history. For instance, the English East India Company's Robert Clive won his celebrated Battle of Plassey by bribing his opposing general not to pitch.

The game simulates this by using a simultaneous auction system whereby the attacking and defending player decide how much of their play money to commit. They secretly place money cards, using the blank card for no bid, face down. The amount of money each player has committed is then revealed simultaneously. This money is forfeited to the bank, win or lose.

The blank money card is retained after battles to use any number of times during the game.

$$\text{Butcher's Bill} = (\text{Attacker's swords} + \text{bid}) - (\text{Defender's swords} + \text{castles} + \text{bid})$$

Waging war inevitably leads to cards in both the attacking and defending melds getting killed. These cards are placed at the bottom of the stock pile instead of discarded to probably take them out the current game.

## Killed Cards

Both sides suffer the same number of killed cards, which diminish the more decisively either side wins. The winner of a battle captures the surviving cards.

This means if the attacker wins, he takes the remainder of the defending meld to his side of the board and replaces the control counter on the board. If the defender wins, surviving attack cards go into his hand.

<b>Butcher's Bill</b>	<b>Killed Cards</b>
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Attacker Wins	
> 2	0
2	1
1	2
Defender Wins	
0	3
-1	2
-2	1
< -2	0

The first killed card of a meld is always the leader, and the winner selects the additionally killed cards in both melds. If the loss of the leader means some cards cannot remain in the meld, the winner takes those to his hand.

Wars where the *Butcher's Bill* is 0 tend to be Pyrrhic, with chances that the entire defending and attacking melds get killed if they contained three cards or fewer.

Winners of battles may add cards from their hand to the defending and attacking melds, thereby possibly making a fresh legal meld if all the cards were killed, else areas which no longer have melds revert to neutral.



After taking Mysore by placing a meld of two cards in that phase of his turn, the Portuguese player announces an attack on English East India Company controlled Pune.

Pune's defence value is just one sword while Mysore has an attack value of three swords. If the defender has cards with castles or swords that can be legally melded to help his defence, he may do so now.

The attacker and defender each place money cards face-down, using their blank card if they don't intend to commit any money to the battle.



Revealing the money cards shows the Portuguese player's attack value is seven, three swords plus ₹4 while English player's defence value is six thanks to committing ₹5. This brings the Butcher's Bill to one, so the attacker wins.

The combat results table shows each side has two killed cards. Since the attacker and defender both only have two cards, all are eliminated in this example.



*Money committed by both sides is paid to the bank, and the killed cards put at the bottom of the stock pile.*



*The Portuguese player has a Lohagad Fort, enabling him to create a new Pune meld and can replace the English East India Company's counter with his. Mysore, however, reverts to neutral.*

## Income

Collect as much money from the bank as you have treasure symbols on melded cards, including cards captured this turn via coups or wars.

The first player to get an income of ₹20 or more wins the game.



Starting player, the Dutch East India Company, ended his turn with a treasure chest symbol per meld giving him an income of ₹3. The English East India Company was drawn to play next, and put five melds on the table, but the treasure chest total is just three, giving an income of ₹3.

## Game End, Determining the winner

The game ends when a player has reached an income of ₹20 or more, ie has 20 or more treasure symbols in melded cards. The player with the second most treasure symbols in melded cards comes second etc, with the number of areas controlled breaking ties.

## Appreciation

Courtesy of Redditors who told me expecting people to print and cut 126 playing cards (not to mention money cards and player tokens) wasn't cool, I discovered Tabletopia where I'm assuming you are reading this.

Many thanks to the wonderful members of the Berlin game designer's group who meet fortnightly at Brettspielplatz. By thrashing me at my own game every time, they helped me polish it slightly though it is still very rough, and suffers horribly from the *runaway leader* problem, which I argue makes this a great historical simulation.

Also thanks to Tom Wham and Richard Hamblen whose *The Great Khan Game*, published in 1989 as an Advanced Dungeons & Dragons module even though it was a standalone hybrid card/board game, for providing the core Rummy-like mechanics I've used here.