

# Keeping Counsel

[Introduction](#)

[Rules](#)

[Setting](#)

[Narrative Control](#)

[Voting](#)

[Setup](#)

[Preparation Phase](#)

[1. Goal and Context](#)

[Example 1:](#)

[2. Class](#)

[3. Liege Facts](#)

[4. Rights and Duties](#)

[Example 2:](#)

[5. Intensity](#)

[Execution Phase](#)

[Narrating the Story](#)

[Prestige](#)

[Aftermath](#)

[Glossary](#)

\*\*\*

## Introduction

Your Queen is strong among monarchs; in her court, foreign princes do her homage, wise countrymen give her counsel, and spirits of air and flame and wood bend their knees to her. Her queendom extends from the salt-blasted coasts through the wavering grasslands and river valleys, and even pierces into the deep of the deserts.

The people of the Queendom do not think of themselves as one blood; only now, under her sagacious rule, they put aside their feuds. Through conquest, diplomacy, and spellcraft, your liege has united ancient foes: the far-riders of the veld, the pikewomen of the crags, the merchant-lords of the Three Jeweled Cities. They do not love one another, but they respect the queen—or fear her.

You have an Office within her court—and with that title comes both Duties and Rights. Your liege will keep your counsel, for those seated around her are her trusted viziers; you may lead her into majesty or madness—but there can never be an easy, perfect peace. You must balance the Favor of the people, the Will of the gods, and the Demands of neighbor-states eager to seize mastery over all that your liege has built.

\*\*\*

## Rules

Keeping Counsel is a game about political intrigue and difficult decisions. It is played by a group of 3 to 6 people in a single or a few play sessions - five or six players seems to provide for better Voting environments. Each player takes on the role of viziers in the court of a great conqueror, with no need for a game master.

The political intrigue takes place in players struggling to achieve a common GOAL — necessarily reachable by only one of them. In doing so, they may enforce their RIGHTS and attend to their DUTIES.

It may be a very rough struggle, with your Rights being undermined and your Duties neglected. Neglecting your Duties will bring bad political consequences – you will have to make difficult decisions to gather allies, avoid enemies and keep your society satisfied, or at least complacent.

## Setting

While by default this game is set in a vaguely medieval fantasy setting, nothing will change about the mechanics if you set your game up as advisors to a Prohibition era crime boss, to the leader of a nomadic space armada of insect people, or to the overseer of an underground fallout shelter. Go nuts! Just be sure to get on the same page with your group when creating your Liege and Vizier sheets.

## Narrative Control

Narrative Control shifts around the table in this game as different players assert their Right to tell the story. The player with Narrative Control at a given point can control every character of the game, not only their own. However, that player's objective is still to make his or her chosen character achieve the common Goal.

Players can contest Narrative Control in order to shift the spotlight and story to help their own character achieve the Goal. The mechanics for shifting narrative control consider two factors:

- the character's strength to enforce their Rights or commitment to their Duties
- how the story pleases the other players

Regarding the second factor, well, it **is** a political game. You cannot simply narrate the entire story in your character's favor - you must manage the interests of the other political actors to get what you want.

## Voting

The conflict resolution mechanic relies on VOTING - the simplest procedure I know that captures the experience of political intrigue.

When Narrative Control is contested by a player, a Vote is called. By default, this is **not** a legal dispute and players don't need to Vote based on fairness. It's a political disputes with its consequences: the way you Vote can provide for allies and enemies and the way you tell the story can influence the Voting — provide a story in which other players characters can also achieve the Goal.

Players can Vote yes, no or declare abstention. Disputes can result in a tie. This is always resolved towards the situation that preserves better the status quo - it's a changing resistant society. What this means in each particular mechanic is presented along with its description.

Sometimes the Voting must be based on fairness, and it is called **Fairness Voting**. Although this is presented in more mechanics, normal Voting is more important to the game (and probably more frequent).

## Setup

To play this game you need paper, writing utensils, and some kind of markers or tokens like wooden pieces, buttons, etc. for recording the characters' Prestige.

There are two sheets: the Liege Sheet and the Vizier Sheet.

The Liege Sheet is common to all players and has these headings:

Context:

Goal:

Fact 1:

Fact 2:

...

Each player has a Vizier Sheet with these headings:

Name:

Class:

Duty 1:

Duty 2:

...

Right 1:

Right 2:

...

Prestige:

**Prestige** is used to influence Voting. Players begin with three Prestige, and should place that many tokens on the table in front of them to indicate this quantity.

## Preparation Phase

The game begins starts with the setting definition by fulfilling the Liege Sheet and the Vizier Sheet. They are filled together in order to provide integration and coherence to the story.

### 1. Goal and Context

On the Liege sheet, the players must come up with the common **Goal** they will pursue. It can be anything that can be achieved by only one of the players. It may contain a brief description of the **Context**, but the Goal itself has to be presented clearly as something achievable by only one character. Everyone must agree with this definition.

#### *Example 1:*

Context: The Queen will die in a few days and she doesn't have an heir. Local customs prescribe that his or her most loyal vizier will take his place.

Goal: Become the next king or queen.

The players write this in the Liege Sheet.

### 2. Class

Each player decides the first trait of their character: their **Class**. There are three possibilities: Cleric, Nobles or Warriors.

**Clerics** have deep connection with other people, specially their faith.

**Nobles** have a good place of birth and access to a great amount of economic resources.

**Warriors** have some kind of military or fighting power.

### 3. Liege Facts

The oldest player, followed by the adjacent player to their right, adds a **Fact** to the Liege Sheet detailing the story's context. It can be anything coherent and relevant to the Goal and the

previous Facts. Each player gets to add one Fact to the sheet. After each Fact's introduction, relevant Rights and Duties are established. Thus, this part of the game oscillates between step 3 and 4 until all the Facts, Rights, and Duties are decided.

Any player can state that he or she thinks that the Fact lacks coherence or relevance to the story. If the first player doesn't agree with him or her, the dispute is resolved by a Fairness Voting of all of the players. A tie is resolved in favor to the player introducing the Fact. If the decision is against the Fact due to lack of coherence or relevance, the player does not add this Fact and the chance goes to the next player.

#### **4. Rights and Duties**

After each Fact is written in the Liege Sheet, every player can add up to three Rights or Duties to his or her Vizier Sheet, as long as it is under these constraints:

- The number of Rights of the character can never be greater than the number of Duties;
- Every Right and Duty has to be related to the last Fact introduced;
- Rights and Duties must be compatible with the character's Class.

The second constraint is subject to a Fairness Voting. The player can add the Right or Duty only if the Voting favors him or is a tie.

The player who introduced the Fact gets to begin. He or she can add one Duty or one Right to his or her Vizier Sheet. Then, in clockwise order, the other players can do the same until everyone has introduced three Rights or Duties or declined to add more.

#### ***Example 2:***

The eldest player is a Cleric who adds the following Fact to the Liege Sheet of Example 1.  
Fact 1: The Queen became very religious with death's approaching.

The player therefore enters into his or her Vizier Sheet:

Duty 1: I must talk to the Queen whenever her Majesty wants to.

The player at his or her right, a Noble, adds to his or her Vizier Sheet:

Duty 1: I must make a donation for Charity in the name of the Crown to please the queen.

The other players decline adding facts and it gets again to the eldest player, who adds a Right:  
Right 1: I may the queen believes whatever I tell them in theological matters of death and afterlife.

Everyone decides not to introduce anything anymore. Step 3 (Fact establishing) begins again for the player to the right of the eldest.

This goes on until all of the players' sum of Rights and Duties is equal to twenty. This number is necessary because everyone has to know the Rights and Duties of each character. Keep track

of too many can be difficult. But since the difficulty about memory varies from people to people, the group can agree with another number.

Having many Rights and Duties gives the players more opportunities to have his or her character as protagonist in a shift of narrative control. However, this represents a tendency for having weak Rights and Duties. This means that they are less likely to effectively provide the shift in narrative control in case there's a dispute for it.

## **5. Intensity**

**Intensity** is a value given to each of the Rights and Duties. Each player has 15 points to distribute among his or her character's Rights and Duties. The greater the number, the more likely the character is to enforce a Right or to be committed to attend to a Duty. The number of points attributed to Rights or Duties can be any integer equal or greater than zero.

# **Execution Phase**

## **Narrating the Story**

The players will now develop the story whose setting was established in the preparation phase. The youngest player can start the story anyway he or she wants to — as long as it is relevant and coherent with what was established as its setting (the other players must act according to this criterion whenever they have the narrative control).

The decision on coherence and relevance here is also subject to a Fairness Voting. If the decision is a tie or against the contested player, the problematic part is considered untold. The player who objected and brought up the Fairness Vote now obtains Narrative Control. Otherwise, the game resumes as if there were no dispute.

If there is no problem of relevance or coherence in the story, the player with Narrative Control keeps it until:

- another player character can enforce a Right
- any player character is not attending to one of his or her Duties

The player striving for the Narrative Control doesn't need to use a Right or a Duty of his or her own character - the player may invoke the Rights or Duties of other characters.

If any player tries to get the Narrative Control of the story, the player currently holding the Narrative Control can proceed similarly by pointing a Right to be enforced or a Duty to be attended. Again, it doesn't have to be his or her character.

If this is the case, there will be a round of Voting. The players declare abstention or Vote for one of the two players to get the bid for Narrative Control. Each Vote adds one to the Intensity of the Right or Duty dispute. Any player can add as much Prestige as he or she wants. Each adds one as if it were a Vote. In case of a tie, that Narrative Control remains with the player who had it before the dispute started.

If the player holding the narrative control doesn't point a Right or a Duty in order to keep the narrative control, it automatically passes to the other player.

The player who wins the dispute continues the story as before: It must be coherent and relevant and he or she must be aware of how the story affect and can be affected by the characters' Rights and Duties.

When one of the characters is told to have accomplished the Goal, the player who created it wins.

## **Prestige**

Whenever a character attends to a Duty in a meaningful situation, he or she earns one **Prestige**. If there's a dispute about how meaningful the situation is, the matter is decided by a Fairness Voting. The tiebreaker goes to not earning the point.

Anyone can point out that the Duty is being attended in a meaningful situation (it doesn't have even to be during a dispute for the narrative control). However, the player who earns the point is the one that created the character attending to the Duty. Nonetheless, pointing out the matter before the player who will earn the point can be a way towards an alliance.

On the other hand, if a character fails to perform one of his or her Duties in a meaningful situation, he or she loses one Prestige. If he or she tried to attend but could not due to having lost a dispute for the Narrative Control, it falls to a Fairness Vote to determine whether the situation was meaningful (especially if not the attending is excusable). A tie results in not losing Prestige.

If a player must lose Prestige but currently has none, the Intensity of the Duty drops by one permanently. If it gets to less than zero, he or she doesn't have this Duty anymore.

## **Aftermath**

Once one of the players has achieved the Goal, the players should each give a few sentences of narration about what happens to each of the characters after the event. This can be collaborative, but the player should have the most say about the fate of their character.

# Glossary

- **Class:** An aspect of a player's character - can be Cleric, Noble, or Warrior.
- **Context:** The details surrounding the Goal of the players.
- **Duty:** Something the player character is assigned to oversee. Consequences abound if the vizier cannot uphold his or her duties.
- **Fact:** An established truth about the Liege or region the players are in.
- **Goal:** A task or situation that each of the players is striving for their character to achieve.
- Intensity:
- **Liege:** The Queen, King, Emperor, President, All-Father, etc. that the player characters must advise.
- **Right:** A special ability that the player character has.
- **Narrative Control:** The ability to narrate what the Liege, player characters, and non player characters are doing. This ability shifts to other players when they invoke a Right or Duty of a character.
- **Prestige:** A resource that can be spent to add to the value of a player's Vote. Prestige is gained when a character attends to a Duty in a meaningful situation, and lost when a character does not complete one of his or her duties.
- **Vizier:** The player characters - advisors to the Liege
- **Voting:** A simple vote of popularity to determine something, however Prestige can be used to add to the value of one's Vote.
- **Voting, fairness:** A vote to determine whether something in the story is cohesive or makes sense. Prestige cannot be used to influence this vote.