

AMBUSH

Tactical Field Manual

A tactical card operation of skirmishes, ambushes, and sudden death.

Version 1.0.0 • Designed and playtested at the family table by Okami Squadron

54-Card Standard Deck (52 + 2 Jokers) • 2–4 Operatives • 10–20 Minutes

1. What Is Ambush?

Ambush is a tactical card game built on the bones of classic War. Every round, each operative secretly commits one card to the field, and the best card takes the pot. The real fight is in what you hold back: Assassins that execute Royalty, Knights that intercept them, and The Gambit, a Joker that drags the whole table into War.

When cards tie, stakes go in blind, sums are contested, and losing cards burn to the Graveyard. The instant one operative runs dry, the operation ends and survivors are scored on everything left in their hands.

2. Setup & Stakes

Use a standard 52-card deck plus both Jokers (54 cards). Shuffle and deal each operative their full Supply. In 4-player games, burn the two leftover cards straight to the Graveyard. Then every operative draws 3 cards to form their opening hand.

Squad Size	Supply Deal	War Stakes	Casualties
2 Players (Duel)	27 cards each	2 supply + 1 hand (sum of 3)	3 cards per loser
3 Players (Default)	18 cards each	2 supply + 1 hand (sum of 3)	3 cards per loser
4 Players (Brawl)	13 cards each (2 burned)	1 supply + 1 hand (sum of 2)	2 cards per loser

3. Combat Ranks & The Intrigue Triangle

Every rank has a skirmish value, a war value, and a final score value. The face cards form an intrigue triangle: each one is a weapon that beats one card and fears another.

Rank	Field Name	Skirmish Power	War Sum	Score	Field Function
King (K)	Royalty	13	13	13	Beats Knights and 2–10. Vulnerable to Assassins.
Queen (Q)	Royalty	12	12	12	Beats Knights and 2–10. Vulnerable to Assassins.
Jack (J)	The Knight	11	11	11	Beats 2–10. Ambushes an Assassin, but only if Royalty is also on the field.

Rank	Field Name	Skirmish Power	War Sum	Score	Field Function
Ace (A)	The Assassin	1 vs numbers; executes Royalty	1	1	Auto-executes any King or Queen on the field. Worth only 1 against plain numbers and in war sums.
2 – 10	Standard Units	Face value	Face value	Face value	Straightforward combat. Higher takes the pot.
Joker	The Gambit	0 (triggers War)	Wild	0	Playing it throws the entire table into War. In war sums it counts as your highest non-Joker card.

The Intrigue Triangle: Royalty beats Knight • Knight ambushes Assassin (only if Royalty is present) • Assassin executes Royalty. If multiple Assassins strike at once, the Assassins enter War. If multiple Knights contest an Assassin, the Knights enter War.

4. A Round of Skirmish

1. Each operative in turn selects one card from their hand and commits it face-down to the field.
2. Once every operative has committed, all cards are revealed simultaneously.
3. Resolve the intrigue first: an Assassin executes any Royalty on the field, unless a Knight is present, in which case the Knight wins the pot.
4. Otherwise the highest skirmish value takes the entire pot into their capture pile. Ties send the tied operatives to War.
5. Every operative draws back up to a 3-card hand from their supply.

5. War & The Gambit

War happens two ways: when the highest cards tie, or when The Gambit (a Joker) is played, in which case every operative at the table enters the War. Resolution:

1. Each participant places blind stakes face-down from their supply: 2 cards in 2–3 player games, 1 card in 4-player games.
2. Each participant commits one card from their hand, face-down.
3. Hands are revealed, then the stakes are revealed.
4. Sums are counted: King 13, Queen 12, Jack 11, 2–10 face value, Ace 1. A Joker in a pile counts as that pile's highest non-Joker card.
5. The highest sum wins the skirmish pot plus their own war cards (stakes and committed hand) into their capture pile.
6. Every loser's war cards burn to the Graveyard, gone for good.
7. Tied sums trigger sudden death: each tied operative flips one supply card, the highest single value wins, and it repeats until a winner emerges.

6. Supply, Recycling & Elimination

- After every round, each operative refills their hand to 3 cards from their supply.
- When your supply runs out, your entire capture pile is shuffled into a fresh supply deck.
- An operative with no supply, no capture pile, and no way to hold 3 cards is eliminated, and the operation ends immediately.

7. Scoring & Victory

The moment the first operative falls, the game ends and nobody keeps playing. Every remaining operative scores the total value of all cards they hold: hand, supply, and capture combined.

Values: 2–10 = face value, Knight (J) = 11, Queen = 12, King = 13, Assassin (A) = 1, The Gambit (Joker) = 0. The highest total wins the operation. A tie between survivors is a stalemate.

8. Quick Start (First Game)

3 players. Shuffle the 54-card deck and deal 18 cards to each player (the whole deck). Draw 3 to your hand. Take turns committing one card face-down, reveal, and fight. That is all you need for a first operation.

9. Design Notes: From Okami Squadron

Ambush started with one question: what if War had actual choices? Classic War is pure luck: flip a card, hope it is high, repeat. Ambush keeps the DNA of War (secret cards, war on ties, blind stakes) and adds the parts that make you think: an intrigue triangle hidden in the ranks, Jokers as weapons, a graveyard that removes cards permanently, and a sudden-death ending instead of a long grind.

It was designed and playtested at the family table by Okami Squadron. Bring your own deck, or try the free browser build on this site.