



# Love Letter™

## Rulebook

### LOVE LETTER PREMIUM EDITION

A card game of courtly romance and intrigue for 2-8 suitors of ages 10 and up by Seiji Kanai

*The guard looked Bartolemew Kaiss up and down for a moment, then frowned. "I'm sorry, Master Kaiss," she said, "but the princess is not seeing visitors at this time. She is, of course, in despair over the arrest of her mother."*

*"Of course," the young composer said, nodding and looking appropriately sympathetic. "But I am not just visiting, you see. Her Highness requested my instruction. We are to practice her singing."*

*"The princess already has a vocal maestro," the gruff woman replied, raising an eyebrow.*

*"I'm sure he knows that, Odette," said a kind voice echoing down the hall that connected the residence to the palace. The two turned to see Susannah, one of Princess Annette's handmaids, walking toward them. "What the good composer means to say is that the Princess requested his work for their practice." The young woman smiled at the dour guard, then turned to give Bartolemew a conspiratorial wink.*





*From his satchel, Bartolemew produced a sealed, wooden tube. “If you will be so kind as to deliver these sheets of music, my dear Susannah,” he said with a smile and a genteel nod. The guard intercepted the tube, but as it changed hands, something with a little weight shifted inside it.*

*“What’s this, then?” the guard asked, jostling it next to her ear.*

*Certainly not a small statue of a bird the Princess is so fond of, Bartolemew thought, but he quickly said, “The... quill and ink I used to pen the music, in case she or the maestro wish to make any changes. I always deliver some with a new composition.”*

*Susannah gently took the case from the suspicious guard. “Oh, would you stop, Odette? It’s just some music,” she chided playfully. “I’ll see to it that milady gets these,” she added, with a hand on Bartolemew’s arm. “I’m sure she’ll be eager to see the contents.”*

## OBJECT OF THE GAME

In the wake of the arrest of Queen Marianna for high treason, none was more heartbroken than her daughter, Princess Annette. Suitors throughout the realm sought to ease Annette’s sorrow by courting her, seeking to bring some joy into her life.

You are one of these suitors, trying to get your love letter to the Princess. Unfortunately, she has locked herself in the palace, so you must rely on intermediaries to carry your message.

During the game, you hold one secret card in your hand. This is who currently carries your message of love for the Princess. Make sure that the person closest to the Princess holds your love letter at the end of the day, so it reaches her first!

# COMPONENTS

- 32 Game Cards
- 8 Player Reference Cards
- 25 Tokens of Affection
- 1 Jester Token
- 40 Sleeves
- 1 Rulebook (this book)

## GAME CARDS

The game has 32 cards, 16 of which are used when playing with 2 to 4 players. The other 16 are added to the game when playing with 5 to 8 players. Each different card name represents someone at the royal residence. Each card has a number in the upper left corner—the higher the number, the closer that person is to the Princess. At the bottom of each card, a text box describes the effect that occurs when the card is discarded.

## REFERENCE CARDS

These list the various cards in the game, as well as summarizing their effects and indicating how many copies are in the deck. They are not used in the game itself, but are provided as a memory aid for players. One side of each reference card summarizes the cards used in the 2 to 4 player game, while the other side summarizes the additional cards used in the 5 to 8 player game.

## TOKENS OF AFFECTION

The red, heart-shaped tokens are used to track Princess Annette's ever-growing affection for those suitors whose letters reach her. One of the tokens is not red. It is the Jester token, which is given to a player when they have been chosen by the Jester card effect.



## SETUP (2 to 4 Players)

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If you are playing the game with 5 to 8 players, consult the setup and play rules on page 7. For 2 to 4 players, assemble the following cards into a deck and place the others aside, as they won't be used in the game:

- Princess
- Countess
- King
- Prince (two copies)
- Handmaid (two copies)
- Baron (two copies)
- Priest (two copies)
- Guard (five copies)

Shuffle these 16 cards to form a face-down draw deck. Remove the top card of the deck from the game without looking at it and place it aside.

If you are playing a 2-player game, take 3 more cards from the top of the deck and place them to the side, face up. They will not be used during this round, but are available for all players to examine during the game.

Each player draws 1 card from the deck. This is the player's hand, and is kept secret from the other players.

Whoever was most recently on a date goes first (if tied, the youngest player wins the tie).

## HOW TO PLAY (2 to 4 Players)

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Love Letter is played in a series of rounds. Each round represents one day. At the end of each round, one player's letter reaches Princess Annette, and she reads it. When she reads enough letters from one suitor, she becomes enamored and grants that suitor permission to court her. That player wins the Princess' heart and the game.

## **Taking A Turn**

On your turn, draw the top card from the deck and add it to your hand. Then, choose one of the two cards now in your hand and discard it face up in front of you. Apply any effect on the card you discarded. You must apply its effect, even if it is bad for you!

See page 8 for the effects of each individual card. If you have any questions about special cases regarding the card, you'll find the answer there.

All discarded cards remain in front of the player who discarded them. Overlap the cards so that it's clear in which order they were discarded. This helps players to figure out which cards other players might be holding.

Once you finish applying the card's effect, the turn passes to the player on your left.

## **Out of the Round**

If a player is knocked out of the round, that player discards the card in his or her hand face up (but does not apply the card's effect) and takes no more turns until the next round.

## **Honesty**

There are various ways a player could cheat. For example, he or she could lie when confronted with the Guard, or fail to discard the Countess when that player also has the King or Prince in his or her hand. We recommend that you don't play with knaves who cheat at fun, light games.

## **Choosing a Player**

If you discard a card with an effect that requires you to choose a player that cannot be chosen due to another card effect (Sycophant, Handmaid), your card is discarded without effect.

## End of a Round

A round ends if the deck is empty at the end of a player's turn. The royal residence closes for the evening, the person closest to the Princess delivers the love letter, and Princess Annette retires to her chambers to read it. All players still in the round reveal their hands. The player with the highest number in their hand wins the round. In case of a tie, players add the numbers on the cards in their discard pile. The highest total wins. If there is still a tie, then all tied players are considered to have won the round.

A round also ends if all players but one are out of the round, in which case the remaining player wins.

After a round ends, the winner (or winners, if there was a tie at the end of the round) receives a Token of Affection. Shuffle all 16 cards together, and play a new round following all of the setup rules above. The winner of the previous round goes first, because the Princess speaks kindly of him or her at breakfast. If there was more than one winner from the previous round as a result of a tie, then whichever of the tied players was most recently on a date goes first.

## Game End and How to Win (2 to 4 Players)

A player wins the game after winning a number of Tokens of Affection based on the number of players:

**2 Players**    **7 tokens**

**3 Players**    **5 tokens**

**4 Players**    **4 tokens**



## SETUP AND PLAY (5 to 8 players)

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If you are playing the game with 5 to 8 players, then assemble all 32 of the cards into a deck. Shuffle them to form a face-down draw deck. Remove the top card of the deck from the game without looking at it and place it aside. Each player draws 1 card from the deck.

Play now proceeds as it would for a 2 to 4 player game. However, note that in the 5-8 player game, when a card's effect requires you to "Name a number", that effect applies to all cards with that number. For example, if you name "4" as a result of the Guard's effect, then it would affect both the Handmaid and the Sycophant, both of whom have a value of "4".

### Game End and How to Win (5 to 8 Players)

A player wins 5 to 8 player games after winning 4 Tokens of Affection.

Because some of the cards used in the 5-8 player version of the game make it possible to gain Tokens of Affection in ways other than winning a round, it's entirely possible that a player could win the game without ever having actually won a round. Such are the vagaries of courtly romance and intrigue!

It's also possible that two (or more) players could "tie" in terms of winning the game, again because of some of the cards used in the 5-8 player version of the game. The Princess has been smitten with several suitors, who must now vie for her affection. In such a case, all of the tied players will play another round to break the tie, and determine who finally wins the hand of the Princess and the game!

For example, say two players, Bob and Susan, remain in the game. Each has 3 Tokens of Affection. In his discard pile, Bob has Constable (If this card is in your discard pile when you are out of the round, gain an Affection Token.). Susan plays a card that knocks Bob out of the round. This leaves Susan as the winner of the round, as she's the last remaining player, so she gains a Token of Affection. However, Bob points to the Constable with a smile when he's eliminated, so he also gains a Token of Affection. Both players now have 4 Tokens of Affection, so they "tie" for the win. Therefore, Bob and Susan now play another round to break the tie.

# ABOUT THE PEOPLE

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Here are brief profiles of the people in the game.

## **8: Princess Annette**

*Hampered only by the naïveté of youth, Princess Annette is elegant, charming, and beautiful. Obviously, you want the princess to carry your letter. However, she is self-conscious about matters of the heart, and if confronted, will toss your letter in the fire and deny looking at any correspondence.*

If you discard the Princess—no matter how or why—she has tossed your letter into the fire. You are immediately knocked out of the round. If the Princess was discarded by a card effect, any remaining effects of that card do not apply (you do not draw a card from the Prince, for example). Effects tied to being knocked out the round still apply (eg. Constable, Jester), however.

## **7: Countess Wilhelmina**

*Always on the prowl for a handsome man or juicy gossip, Wilhelmina's age and noble blood make her one of Princess Annette's friends. While she has great influence over the Princess, she makes herself scarce whenever the King or Prince are around.*

Unlike other cards, which take effect when discarded, the text on the Countess applies while she is in your hand. In fact, the only time it doesn't apply is when you discard her.

If you ever have the Countess and either the King or Prince in your hand, you must discard the Countess. You do not have to reveal the other card in your hand. Of course, you can also discard the Countess even if you do not have a royal family member in your hand. The Countess likes to play mind games....



## **6: King Arnaud IV**

*The undisputed ruler of the realm... for the moment. Because of his role in the arrest of Queen Marianna, he does not rate as highly with Princess Annette as a father should. He hopes to work himself back into her graces.*

When you discard King Arnaud IV, trade the card in your hand with the card held by another player of your choice. You cannot trade with a player who is out of the round.

## **5: Prince Arnaud**

*As a social gadfly, Prince Arnaud was not as distressed over his mother's arrest as one would suppose. Since many women clamor for his attention, he hopes to help his sister find the same banal happiness by playing matchmaker.*

When you discard Prince Arnaud, choose one player still in the round (including yourself). That player discards his or her hand (but doesn't apply its effect, unless it is the Princess, see page 8) and draws a new one. If the deck is empty and the player cannot draw a card, that player draws the card that was removed at the start of the round. If all other players are protected by the Handmaid, you must choose yourself.

## **4: Handmaid Susannah**

*Few would trust a mere Handmaid with a letter of importance. Fewer still understand Susannah's cleverness, or her skilled ability at playing the foolish Handmaid. That the Queen's confidante and loyal servant escaped any attention after the Queen's arrest is a testament to her clever mind.*

When you discard the Handmaid, you are immune to the effects of other players' cards until the start of your next turn. If all players other than the player whose turn it is are protected by the Handmaid, the player must choose him- or herself for a card's effects, if possible.

### 3: Baron Talus

*The scion of an esteemed house that has long been a close ally of the royal family, Baron Talus has a quiet and gentle demeanor that conceals a man used to being obeyed. His suggestions are often treated as if they came from the King himself.*

When you discard the Baron, choose another player still in the round. You and that player secretly compare your hands. The player with the lower number is knocked out of the round. In case of a tie, nothing happens.

### 2: Priest Tomas

*Open, honest, and uplifting, Father Tomas always seeks out the opportunity to do good. With the arrest of the Queen, he is often seen about the palace, acting as confessor, counselor, and friend.*

When you discard the Priest, you can look at another player's hand. Do not reveal the hand to any other players.

### 1: Guard Odette

*Charged with seeing to the security of the royal family, Odette follows her orders with persistence and diligence... even though her mentor is said to have drowned while fleeing arrest for complicity in the Queen's treason.*

When you discard the Guard, choose a player and name a number (other than 1). If that player has that number in their hand, that player is knocked out of the round. If all other players still in the round cannot be chosen (eg. due to Handmaid or Sycophant), this card is discarded without effect.



**The following cards are used only in 5 to 8 player games of Love Letter Premium:**

## **9: Bishop Vinizio**

*Measured and calculating, Bishop Vinizio may come across as a schemer or opportunist. The truth, though, is that he cares deeply for the welfare of his congregants, and will go to great lengths to protect and help them.*

Discarding the Bishop allows you to name a number and a player. If the player has that number in their hand, you get a Token of Affection. If this would give you enough Tokens to win the game, then you win immediately and the game ends. If you gained a Token of Affection from this effect, then the player whose card you effectively revealed with the Bishop may discard their card (but doesn't apply its effects, unless it is the Princess, see page 8) and draw a new one.

At the end of a round, despite his impressive 9, the Princess still beats the Bishop when comparing the values of cards in players' hands. He is considered to have a value of 9 for all other game effects, however.

## **7: Dowager Queen Tummia**

*Mother to King Arnaud, the dowager Queen Mother Tummia was devastated by the arrest of her daughter-in-law, Queen Marianna. She now focuses her attention on her granddaughter, Princess Annette, in whom she sees much of the deposed Queen.*

When you discard the Dowager Queen, choose another player still in the round. You and that player secretly compare your hands. The player with the higher number is knocked out of the round. In case of a tie, nothing happens.

## **6: Constable Viktor**

*Because the security of the royal court ultimately rests in the hands of Constable Viktor, it was his decision to arrest the Queen for high treason. Now, as the weight of his duty bears down on him, he is determined to see no harm befall the young Princess.*

The Constable is a somewhat unusual card, insofar as its effect applies not when discarded, like most cards, but when you are knocked out of the round with it in your discard pile. Should this happen, show the Constable, then claim a Token of Affection. If this would give you enough Tokens to win the game, then you win immediately and the game ends.

## 5: Count Guntram

*An ambitious man, the wily Count Guntram is careful to offer his support to whomever he believes is most likely to benefit his own interests in court. Once he has made his choice, though, his loyalty is certain, as he continues to work behind the scenes on his chosen patron's behalf.*

When the round ends, if it is necessary to check the number in the players' hands to determine a winner, the Count will increase that number by 1. Note that this stacks, so if you have both copies of the Count in your discard pile, the number will increase by 2. In this case, the cards with a number of 7—the Countess and the Dowager Queen—would beat the Princess. If increasing the number of the card in your hand with the Count would result in a tie for highest number in a player's hand, then resolve ties normally, by adding the numbers of the cards in the discard pile of each tied player and comparing the totals.

## 4: Sycophant Morris

*The Sycophant is a true opportunist. Obsequious to the point of groveling, he will do almost anything to gain favor from more powerful and influential courtiers, then seek to use that favor to further his own standing in court.*

When you discard the Sycophant, choose a player (including yourself). Then, as long as the next card played has an effect that chooses one or more players, it has to at least choose the player you chose with the Sycophant.

## 3: Baroness Fiona

*While Baroness Fiona is seemingly content to remain in the political shadow of her husband, Baron Talus, this is really a ruse. Fiona has a keen mind for courtly intrigue, and will take firm, albeit discrete action as she sees fit, regardless of whether it aligns with her husband's interests.*

When you discard the Baroness, you can look at the hands of either 1 or 2 other players. Do not reveal them to any other players.



## 2: Cardinal Vesper

*A devout and notoriously uncompromising man, Cardinal Vesper would see the Princess married to an “appropriate” suitor—and as soon as possible, at that. The girl’s happiness is certainly a consideration, but stabilizing the royal family and its succession in the wake of the Queen’s alleged treason is what matters most.*

When you discard the Cardinal, choose exactly 2 players (you may include yourself), who will switch hands. Then, once the hands are switched, you may look at one of them without revealing it to any other players. If less than 2 players still in the round can be chosen, (eg. due to Handmaid or Sycophant), this card is discarded without effect.

## 1: Guard Dougaul

*Dour and uncompromising, Dougaul is every bit as committed to the security and well-being of the royal family as Odette, his fellow Guard. He has an abiding, almost fatherly fondness for the young Princess, though, and will cast a wary and searching eye on any suitor seeking her favor.*

When you discard the Guard, choose a player and name a number (other than 1). If that player has that number in their hand, that player is knocked out of the round. If all other players still in the round cannot be chosen (eg. due to Handmaid or Sycophant), this card is discarded without effect.

## 0: Jester Darius

*Although often seen in court, Jester Darius is a mere entertainer. This might seem to suggest his influence is negligible, but like many of low station who work in the royal court, Darius is largely invisible to the powerful courtiers around him. As a result, he sees and hears much more than most realize, giving him a potent sort of influence of his own.*

When you discard the Jester, choose another player—ideally, the one you believe is most likely to win the round. It's helpful to place the Jester token provided in the game near the player you chose, so everyone remembers your choice. If you're correct, and your chosen player does win the round, you gain a Token of Affection. If this would give you enough Tokens to win the game, then you win immediately and the game ends.

## 0: Assassin

*A shadowy and elusive figure of menace, the Assassin will work for whomever can meet his price. He is particularly adept at circumventing the Guards who protect the court, allowing him to pursue his secretive activities undisturbed—whether that's delivering a suitor's letter of affection to the cloistered Princess, or conducting more sinister business...*

This is a card whose effect only applies while it is in your hand. If another player chooses you when playing a Guard, then regardless of what number that player named (even 0!), when you reveal the Assassin (to all players), the Guard's player is eliminated from the round, while you are not. Of course, all other players will now know that you have the Assassin in your hand. It would be both improper and dangerous to keep consorting with such an unsavory character, so after you've resolved the Assassin's effect, you must discard him and draw a new card. If the deck is empty and you cannot draw a card, then draw the card that was removed at the start of the round.



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*Dedicated to the wives and girlfriends of game designers who let us play games when we should be home. Thank you for being my princess, Julie.*

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