

Matriarchy — Shared Deck Variant

queens build · kings sweep · jacks freeze · the advisor redeems

Overview

Matriarchy is a two-player card game using a standard 52-card deck. Players alternate drawing from a single shared deck and build towers of cards in ascending rank order. Face cards resolve towers permanently — Queens and Aces score points, Kings sweep towers away, Jacks freeze them and penalise if unresolved.

The twist: face cards belong to their color. Draw your opponent's color and it goes straight to them.

The Cards

Card	Placement Rank	Role & Effect
2-10	Face value	Builders. Placed on your own towers regardless of suit color.
Jack ♠	11	Freezes the tower it lands on. Only Queen, Ace, or King may follow — another Jack may not. Unresolved at game end: $-\text{floor}(\text{count}/2)$ points.
Queen ♠	12	Closes tower for $+\text{count}$ points (clean) or $+\text{floor}(\text{count}/2)$ points (over Jack).
King ♣	13	Sweeps tower — slot freed, score zero.
Ace	14	Closes any tower for $+\text{floor}(\text{count}/2)$ points. Rescues frozen (Jack) towers for positive score. Cannot start a tower.

Scoring uses **card count** — each card in a closed tower is worth 1 point, regardless of face value.

Setup

Shuffle the full 52-card deck. Place it face-down as a single shared draw pile. Each player sets up four empty tower slots in front of them.

Decide who plays Red (Hearts & Diamonds face cards) and who plays Black (Spades & Clubs face cards). Number cards belong to no one — they are placed on your own towers regardless of suit.

Turn Structure

On your turn:

1. **Draw** — take the top card of the shared deck, or take the top card of the communal discard pile (see below).
 2. **Route the card:**
 - **Your color face card** (or any number card) → place it on one of your towers, or discard it to the communal pile if unplayable.
 - **Opponent's color face card** → hand it to your opponent immediately. They place it now. Their next turn is then skipped. Your turn resumes — you do not lose your turn.
-

Building Towers

- A card may only be placed on a tower if its placement rank **equals or exceeds** the top card's rank.
 - You may have at most **4 open towers** at once.
 - An Ace may never start a tower — if drawn when you have no open towers, it is discarded.
 - A Jack freezes the tower it lands on. Only a Queen (12), King (13), or Ace (14) may follow. Another Jack may not be placed on a frozen tower.
 - A King sweeps a tower immediately — all cards are removed, the slot is freed, and the score for that tower is zero.
 - A Queen or Ace closes a tower permanently — the slot is freed and the score is banked.
-

The Communal Discard Pile

Discarded number cards go face-up to a shared communal pile visible to both players. On your turn, before drawing from the shared deck, you may instead take the **top card** of the communal pile.

- Only number cards (2-10) enter the communal pile — face cards that cannot be placed are burned (removed from play).

- You draw from the communal pile **or** the shared deck — not both.

The Moat

Each player may bank up to 2 number cards (2-10) in their Moat as reserves instead of placing them on a tower.

- **Banking:** on your turn, instead of placing a number card on a tower, you may set it aside in your Moat. Face cards and Aces may never enter the Moat.
- **Sealing:** your Moat seals permanently once both Kings of your color have been played — whether you drew and placed them yourself, or your opponent drew them and handed them to you. Once sealed, no further banking is possible.
- **Deployment:** when one of your Kings sweeps a tower, the lowest-value card in your Moat is automatically deployed into the freed slot as the base of a new tower. Deployment is immediate and automatic — you do not choose which card deploys.
- **End penalty:** each Moat card not deployed by game end subtracts its face value from your score. A banked 6 that was never deployed costs -6 points.

Scoring

Outcome	Score
Queen — clean close	+count (every card in tower including Queen)
Queen over Jack	+floor(count/2)
Ace — clean close	+floor(count/2) including Ace
Ace over Jack	+floor(count/2) — Jack redeemed for positive score
King sweep	0 — slot freed
Jack — unresolved at game end	-floor(count/2)
Open tower — stranded at game end	0
Moat card — unused at game end	-face value

Count = total number of cards in the tower at the moment it closes (including the closing card).

Game End

The game ends when the shared deck and communal pile are both exhausted. Any open towers are scored as stranded (0) or Jack-penalised ($-\text{floor}(\text{count}/2)$) as appropriate.

The player with the higher total score wins.

The Handoff

When you draw a face card in your opponent's color:

- Hand it to them immediately — they place it right now on one of their towers.
- If they cannot place it (no legal tower), it is burned.
- Their **next turn is skipped** — they do not draw on their following turn.
- Your turn then **resumes** — you do not draw again, but you are not penalised for triggering the handoff.

A single unlucky run of draws could hand your opponent several face cards in a row. Each is placed immediately as drawn — there is no holding cards.

Strategy Notes

Queens and Aces are your clock. There are only 4 Queens and 4 Aces in your color. Each one spent closes a tower — but once they are gone, you can no longer score positively. Build towers deliberately so Queens land on tall stacks.

Handoffs are forced interaction. Drawing your opponent's Queen and handing it over feels bad — but the skip that follows gives you a tempo advantage. Watch the deck for face card clusters.

Jacks are shared danger. With all 8 Jacks in one deck, freezes come unpredictably. Keep at least one King or Ace in reserve if possible to resolve them.

The communal pile is live. Unlike earlier versions of Matriarchy, the communal pile sees heavy use in this variant. Watch what your opponent discards — a high number card on the pile may extend your tallest tower better than a blind draw.

Kings are neutral — but the Moat makes them useful. A King sweeps your tower for zero — no points, but no penalty either. The real value is the Moat deployment that follows: a sweep plus a Moat deploy turns a painful event into a useful reset. Bank low cards early, before your Kings are played and the Moat seals.

Watch your Moat seal trigger. Your Moat seals when both your color's Kings are played — even if your opponent draws and hands them to you. If both Red Kings appear early in the deck, Red's Moat could seal before Red has had a chance to bank anything.

Matriarchy — 2 players · standard 52-card deck