

# **Comrade Stalin**

A deadly game  
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## Overview

*Comrade Stalin* is a game for 5 to 9 people. Every player will take on a randomly selected role. One will get to play Stalin, while the others will be members of Stalin's court. Everyone except Stalin will also get two randomly determined goals, which take the form of either having to kill someone, or having to protect someone.

And then the killing starts.

## Materials

To play *Comrade Stalin*, you need these rules; the role sheets, printed out; a deck of normal playing cards; and approximately 20 tokens. Tokens could be poker chips, dice, pawns, glass beads, dried beans, or anything else that is small, inedible and doesn't roll off the table.

The players should sit in a circle, around a space where they can all easily display their role sheet, cards and tokens. Having some kind of table in the middle is ideal.

## Dealing the roles

Take the diamonds and one joker from a deck of cards. Then choose a number of cards equal to the number of players, corresponding to the roles you want to use during this game. The ace of diamonds corresponds to Stalin. The other cards correspond to the role sheets on which they are mentioned.

*Example:*

In a game with 7 players, the group decides to play with Stalin, the Favourite, the Heir, the Assassin, the Believer, the Informer and the Protégé. They look at the role sheets, and see that they need to pick the ace, king, queen, 9, 8 and 7 of diamonds, as well as the joker.

Every game must contain Stalin. It is also advisable to have at least one of the Favourite and the Heir.

*Example:*

The next round, the players decide to have a little more randomness. They shuffle the queen through 7 of diamonds and the joker, and pick five random cards from this pile. To these they add the ace and the king, to ensure that Stalin and the Favourite will be in the game.

Once the cards are assembled, shuffle them and deal one to each player, open. Every player now takes the role sheet that belongs to their card and puts it in front of them, visible to all. Stalin has no role sheet.

## Playing the roles

If your group wants to, you can all act as the character you were dealt. The General could boast about his military exploits, the Believer could expound on the blessings of collectivisation, and so on. This is not necessary. Do whatever your group prefers.

One thing is not optional, though: you must call everyone "comrade." Stalin is called "comrade Stalin." All the other players are to be called by their real names, e.g., "comrade Remko," "comrade Annet," and so on.

## Dealing the goals

Now, all players except Stalin and the Protégé (if anyone has that role) get two goal cards. To assemble the goal cards, look at the roles that have been dealt. For every role that has been dealt, take the corresponding card in spades, clubs and hearts.

*Example:*

If someone plays the Heir (which corresponds to the queen), you add the queen of spades, clubs and hearts.

Do not add any aces at this point. Shuffle the goal cards, and then discard one third of them. Nobody should see which cards are discarded. Now, add the three remaining aces: the ace of spades, the ace of clubs, and the ace of hearts.

Shuffle the goal cards, and deal two to each player (except Stalin and the Protégé), closed. Three cards will be left, which you again discard without looking.

People can look at their own goal cards whenever they want, but they cannot show them to anyone else, even if they want to. Complete secrecy is very important!

## The meaning of the goals

Black goal cards (spades and clubs) mean that you must kill someone. Red goal cards (hearts) mean that you must protect someone. The value of the card (ace, king, and so on) indicates the person you must defend or kill.

*Example:*

Mary has the queen of hearts and the 8 of spades. Her goals are to protect the Heir (queen) and to kill the Believer (8).

*Example:*

Richard has the ace of clubs and the jack of spades. His goals are to kill Stalin (ace) and to kill the General (jack).

If you have a card indicating yourself, it counts as indicating Stalin instead.

*Example:*

Victor plays the Heir (queen). One of his goal cards is the queen of hearts. It doesn't mean that he must protect himself, but instead means that he must protect Stalin.

You can have contradictory goal cards, i.e., cards that tell you to kill and protect the same person. Don't worry: there is a way to get rid of goal cards, which will be explained later.

## Final preparations

Set an alarm clock to go off somewhere between 30 and 45 minutes from now. The player with the lowest ranking role (in terms of the corresponding cards; the Ace is highest, the Joker ranks below all others) chooses the exact time. Everyone is allowed to know this, and to look at a clock whenever they want. This is the maximum duration of the game.

If someone plays the Informer, they use their "I have the dirt on you" ability now.

If someone plays the Protégé, they use their “Powerful patron” ability now (after the Informer).  
Everyone gets the number of counters indicated on their role sheet. Stalin gets no counters.

## Playing the game

Mainly, you will be talking. There are no formal turns, but it is suggested that Stalin tries to keep things orderly. Anyone who wants to use a special ability – like spying – can do so just by announcing they will do so, and this will be resolved before any other people use their special abilities. This can be done even during a killing.

The only part of the game covered by strict rules are attempted killings.

## Attempted killing

### Starting an attempt

Anyone can announce that they want to attempt a killing, as long as no killing is being attempted right now. If a killing is being attempted right now, resolve it before you start another attempt.

Stalin can attempt to kill anyone (except for himself and the Protégé). All other players can only attempt to kill Stalin. So every attempted killing is either initiated by Stalin, or directed at Stalin.

If Stalin and a player want to attempt a killing at the same time, let the person whose last attempt was longest ago go first. If this rule doesn't decide the issue, let Stalin go first.

### Resolving an attempt

During an attempted killing, players can declare that they are in favour of killing the target (making them an *attacker*), or they can step up to defend the target (making them a *defender*). The target dies if the number of attackers is greater than the number of defenders. If there is a tie, the target survives.

Stalin can never be an attacker or a defender. He is dependent on other people to obey and protect him. Furthermore, the target cannot be an attacker or a defender either. Once you are accused, you need other people to defend you.

#### *Example*

Stalin starts an attempted killing against Remko. Stalin doesn't count as an attacker, and Remko, being the target, doesn't count as a defender. Nobody speaks up, so there is a tie and Remko survives.

#### *Example*

The same situation, but this time Annet speaks up: “Comrade Stalin, I agree with you that comrade Remko must be removed.” Nobody else speaks up, and thus Remko dies. (Unless Stalin decides to spare him, see below.)

#### *Example*

The same situation, but now, after Annet has spoken, Erik speaks up: “Comrade Stalin, I must insist that comrade Remko not be killed. He is a true servant of the revolution.” With one defender and one attacker, Remko would survive. Unfortunately for him, Annet has the Assassin role, and decides to use her Merciless attribute. By spending one token, she can have her vote count double. With two attackers and only one defender, Remko is killed. (Again

unless Stalin decides to spare him, see below.)

Note that if someone attempts to kill Stalin, that person *does* count as an attacker.

#### *Example*

At the end of the game, only Stalin and Annet are left alive. Stalin is ready to end the game, but Annet suddenly says: "I am sorry, comrade, but I have to kill you." Because Annet counts as an attacker and Stalin does not count as a defender, Stalin dies and Annet is the only person left alive.

Once you have declared yourself to be an attacker or defender, there is no way to step back or change your vote (during this attempt).

There is no limit on the number of attackers or defenders. It is possible to have 5 attackers and 0 defenders, or 2 attackers and 5 defenders, for instance.

During an attempted killing, you can plead, persuade and threaten as much as you want. However, if someone believes that the game should proceed, they can start counting down, slowly and out loud, from 5 to 0. If nobody new has declared themselves to be an attacker or defender by the time 0 is reached, the attempted killing will be resolved. If somebody new does step into the fray, stop counting. If the remaining deliberations take too long, you can always start counting again.

#### **Who dies?**

Once it is clear who are the attackers and who are the defenders, and it is clear that the attackers are in the majority, it is time to decide who will die.

If the target is Stalin, Stalin dies. Furthermore, the person who started the attempted killing – and that person only – gets to decide which of Stalin's defenders will also die. The original attacker can tell a story about how the coup takes place, if he or she so wishes.

#### *Example*

Erik starts an attempt on Stalin's life. During the ensuing discussion, Annet and Remko declare themselves as Stalin's defenders; while Eva and Sanne join Erik as attackers. Since the attackers are in the majority, they win. Stalin dies. Erik gets to decide whether Annet and/or Remko will also die; he chooses to have Remko killed. Thus, Stalin and Remko die. Erik, Eva, Sanne, and Annet survive. Erik narrates how he strangles Stalin with a USSR flag.

If the target is not Stalin, Stalin gets to make all the decisions. He chooses who among the target and the defenders will die, in any combination he likes. He can kill only the target, or only some of the defenders, or the target and some or all defenders. Stalin can even choose to have nobody killed, sparing their lives.

For every person he has killed, Stalin must appoint one of the attackers as the killer. The attacker has no choice in this, and cannot refuse to perform the killing. Stalin must choose a different killer for every person he wants to have killed.

#### *Example*

Stalin attempts to kill Eva. Sanne defends her, while Remko, Erik and Annet attack her. Stalin now gets to choose the fates of Eva and Sanne. He decides to have them both killed. He appoints Annet as the killer of Eva, and Remko as the killer of Sanne. He could not have chosen one person to kill both.

#### **Effects of killing**

When Stalin chooses a player to kill another player, they first get to describe how they do this. A

bullet in the neck; a show trial; deportation to Siberia; unknown tortures in the cellars of the NKVD building; whatever fits your character, and your relationship with the other character. Then two things happen:

1. The killer discards one of his goal cards. Nobody gets to see it (unless it already was face up).
2. The killed person chooses one of his or her goal cards and gives it to the killer; only the killer gets to see it, and places it on the table where the discarded goal card used to be.

Thus, a player always has two goal cards, but he can get different cards during the game by killing people. (Note that when Stalin is killed, no goal cards are discarded or changed, not even if some of the people defending him are killed as well.)

A person who has been killed is out of the game. Dead people cannot vote or use abilities.

## Ending the game

The game ends when one of the following things happen:

1. The alarm clock goes off. (If this happens during an attempted killing, the killing is aborted and nobody dies.)
2. Stalin is killed.
3. Stalin ends the game by announcing that all traitors are dead. (Stalin cannot announce this during an attempted killing, and if he announces this, the other players get one last chance to attempt to kill Stalin, if any of them is inclined to try.)

When the game ends, all special role rules that happen at the end of the game are resolved. Then all surviving players reveal their goals, and it is determined who wins the game.

## Winning the game

Stalin wins if and only if (a) he is still alive; and (b) none of the surviving players have a role card which means that they must kill Stalin. He has succeeded in ridding his court of traitors.

Other players win if and only if (a) they are still alive; and (b) they have achieved both of the goals on their goal cards. You have successfully killed someone if they are dead – it doesn't matter who did the actual killing. You have successfully defended someone if they are alive – it doesn't matter whether you played any role in their survival.

## Playing Stalin

As Stalin, you need to find out who wants to betray you. And then you need to kill them. This may seem very difficult, because you have no powers of your own: you cannot spy, and you do not count as an attacker.

But remember this: all the other players can only be killed by you deciding to have them killed. They justifiably fear you. Use that fear. Start the game by looking at someone with the spying ability, and saying something like “Comrade Remko, it would be a great boon to the revolution if you spied on comrade Erik and would tell us all what you saw.”

You cannot *force* Remko to do that. He has every right to refuse. But if he refuses, he must be a

traitor, right? So in that case you will start an attempted killing against him, which will probably succeed. Remko knows that. So he will probably do what you ask.

Will he tell you the truth about what he sees? That's up to him to decide. But I'm sure you can think of ways to find out. Remember this well, comrade Stalin: only the ruthless survive.