

The image shows a steampunk-themed title page for an instruction manual. The background is a dark, intricate mechanical scene with gears, cogs, and Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII) visible. The title "Steam Court" is written in a large, ornate, white gothic-style font, centered across the page. The word "Steam" is on the left and "Court" is on the right, separated by a central mechanical assembly of gears and a needle-like pointer. Below the title, the words "Instruction manual" are written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The entire scene is framed by a light brown, metallic-looking border with decorative elements at the corners and sides.

Steam Court

Instruction manual

In a metal-riveted palace, covered in a heavy layer of coal dust, lies the Steam Court. Steam Court is a 1–12 player card game with elements of traditional trick taking, character-based abilities, and various victory conditions.

Tasked with the upkeep of the court's mechanical devices, players try to catch the eye of the Queen and her Courtiers by displaying their mechanical prowess. Using their numbered gear cards, players try to win tricks and be the first to play all their cards. The Queen rewards such displays of skill by snatching up the most successful Engineer as her own. Can you engineer your way into the Queen's good graces and come out on top of the social ladder? Or will you be stuck assisting the Tea Boy and suffering his incessant whining?



The Goal

Prove that you are the most skilled engineer by collecting the highest sum of gear tokens by the end of the fourth Quarter. Gear tokens are awarded based on the order in which players get rid of all the cards in their hand. By utilizing the privileges granted to you by the Royals and Renegades, you can astound the court and take your rightful place next to her Royal Majesty the Queen.

Contents

- 12 Character cards
- 2 Decks of cards containing:
 - 6 of each gear card 1–12
 - 3 Masterstroke cards
 - 3 Multiplier cards
 - 3 3/9 cards
 - 3 6/12 cards
- 2 Playmats
- 24 Gear tokens (1–6)
- 12 Starting tokens
- Instruction manual



Game Setup

2–6 Players (see p. 13 for other variations)

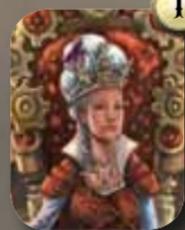
Set out character cards according to the diagram on the following page (for fewer than 6 players refer to p. 21).

Gather the four sets of gear tokens corresponding to the number of players (e.g. 5 players would use gears 1–5). Stack each set of gear tokens from highest on top to lowest and place one stack on each Quarter space on the playmat.

Shuffle and deal one deck of cards into equal hands for each player plus an extra hand called the “Court Hand.” If the cards do not deal evenly, place the extra cards in the Court Hand.

Finally, players randomly draw start tokens to determine seating. Players should sit behind the character card with corresponding number on it. Players should keep their start token for end-of-game scoring.

Queen



General



Duke



Time Traveler



Tea Boy



Jester





Game Play



Privileges: Starting with the Queen and going clockwise, players use any Beginning of Quarter special privileges listed on their character card.

First Trick: The Queen starts the first trick by laying any quantity of cards with the same value (e.g. three 2s). The card quantity for the trick has been set. Subsequent players must play the same quantity of matching cards but of increasing value (e.g. three 3s -> three 5s). Each player is trying to beat the previous player's cards.

Passing: A player who can't play (or chooses not to) passes by turning his character card over to the "Pass" side and sits out for the rest of the trick. Play proceeds around and around the table with players continuing to lay cards until everyone passes.

Winning the Trick: The trick (or "machine") is finished once everyone has passed. Whoever played the highest card(s) wins the trick. The Tea Boy clears the cards and puts them in a discard pile, and everyone turns their character card back to the active side. The winner leads off the next trick.

End of Quarter: When a player gets rid of all his cards, he takes the highest-point gear token remaining on the stack of tokens for that Quarter. Play continues around the table on that trick until everyone has passed. If no higher cards were played, the player to the left of the player who went out starts the next trick. Game play continues until only one player is left with cards. That player takes the last (lowest-point) gear token, and the Quarter ends.

Tokens: Tokens represent points that the engineers win depending on the order they go out. The first player out takes the highest number token and so on until the last player takes the 1-point token. This last token has a special power on the back that the player can use at any time. Keep the token number-side up until the power is used and then flip it over. The player does not sacrifice the victory point for using the power.

Starting a New Quarter: Before the next Quarter begins, players leave their current seats and character cards and reseal based on the order in which they went out. The player who went out first becomes the preminent player at the table for the next Quarter. (e.g. The Duke got rid of

his cards first and takes over as the Queen). After the players have reseated, the cards are shuffled and dealt for the 2nd Quarter. Once again, players exercise their Beginning of Quarter privileges starting with the Queen. After the privileges have been exercised, the new Queen begins the Quarter by leading the first trick. Play proceeds in a similar fashion for the 3rd and 4th Quarters.

End of 4th Quarter: At the end of the 4th Quarter, players add up their starting character token and the four gear tokens they collected. Whoever has the highest total has proven to be the most skillful engineer and wins the game!



Explanation of Cards and Tokens



The **Masterstroke** card beats all other cards. As soon as a Masterstroke card is played, it ends the trick (you cannot beat a Masterstroke with another Masterstroke). If you are dealt three Masterstroke cards, you can pull a coup and seize the throne! You immediately move to the Queen's seat, and as necessary other players move down one seat. The cards are reshuffled, dealt, and then the Quarter restarts.



A **Multiplier** card (X) can be played with one or more of the same numbered card(s). The player announces the number of times the card(s) will be multiplied (a 2 card and a Multiplier could equal two 2s, three 2s, eight 2s, infinity 2s.). A Multiplier can be played as a multiple of one (played with a 2 card as $2 \times 1 = 2$). It can also be played by itself, but it will equal a single 1 card.



The **3/9** cards can be played as either a 3 or as a 9 (whichever the player determines to be most valuable to his hand).



The **6/12** cards can be played as either a 6 or as a 12 (whichever the player determines to be most valuable to his hand).



Each **1-point gear token** has a special ability that can be used *one time* by the player who received it (the lowest player needs all the help he can get). He may use the token at any time, and keeps the token after it is played for scoring at the end. *Tip:* keeping the token number-side up before use and flipping it to the text side after it has been used is a good way to keep track.

The **Unpass token** allows a player who has already passed to “unpass” and play a card(s). He should use this token when it would normally be his turn (before the player to his left has played any cards).

The **Discard two cards token** allows a player to discard two of his numbered gear cards once during the game.





Characters

Each character has a special privilege listed on the bottom of their card. Some privileges are exercised after the cards are dealt, but before the first cards are played. These Beginning of Quarter privileges are exercised in number order from the preminent character to the most inferior.



1. The Queen

Her Royal Majesty the Queen presides over the court from her gear encrusted throne. Nothing escapes her shrewd gaze or her iron fist. The Queen grants her engineer the ability to bestow one undesirable card on any player at the table. The Queen's Engineer also begins play each Quarter.



2. The General

Second only to the Queen, the General commands respect and obedience. The General's Engineer may give one of his undesirable cards to any other player at the table besides the Queen. Once during the Quarter, he may stop any player from laying a card/set (except for a lead card). The player does not forfeit the trick, but must wait until play goes all the way around the table before laying another card.



3. The Duke

The Duke smiles and bows before the Queen, all the while using his connections to increase his power and influence. The

Duke's Engineer needs to only match the previously laid card/set. He does not have to play higher valued cards. Three 4s → three 4s.



4. The Time Traveler

Past, present, future—they all blend into one for a time traveler. The Time Traveler's Engineer has the unique ability to learn from his mistakes.

Once during the Quarter, after losing a trick, he may retrieve the last card/set he played during that trick.

5. The Jester

He entertains the Court with tricks and jokes, but the Jester's true skill is the art of



distraction. The Jester's Engineer may un-pass once during the Quarter. He may also trick the other Engineers one time by playing a single card as though it were a set of 2.



6. The Tea Boy

The Tea Boy hides his sneer by bending low over the steaming silver pot. At the beginning of the Quarter, the Tea Boy's Engineer must give his two highest numbered cards (not special cards) to the preminent player at the table. After serving his best, he may decide to trade his hand with the Court Hand (before looking at it). He must keep any cards given to him by other Engineers. The Tea Boy's Engineer is also responsible for shuffling and dealing the cards for the Quarter and for clearing the gears after each machine is complete.



7. The Submariner

The Submariner spends little time on land. He is much more comfortable sealed in a metal can under the sea. The Submariner grants his Engineer the ability to dive into the Court Hand or discard pile. Once during the Quarter, he may reveal a numbered card from his hand, shuffle the pile, and then pull out that many cards. He must keep at least half of the cards he draws.



8. The Inspector

No secret or scheme can remain hidden from the Inspector. He's a master of tracking down clues and solving mysteries. The Inspector's Engineer may seek out

information by looking at the Court Hand and the hand of one other Engineer.



9. The Alchemist

The Alchemist rarely emerges from his laboratory. He has no use for politics and court intrigue when he is on the verge of unlocking the mysteries of the universe. The Alchemist's Engineer may transmute one thing into another. He may lower the value of any of his numbered cards by exactly two digits.



10. The Pirate

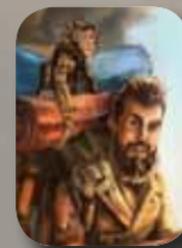
Whether sailing on the high seas, navigating through the skies, or wending her way through city streets, the Pirate has a swagger

that can't be ignored. Once per Quarter, the Pirate grants her Engineer the ability to steal a numbered card from the play pile (the machine) before the Vagabond clears the cards (this doesn't affect the previously played cards).



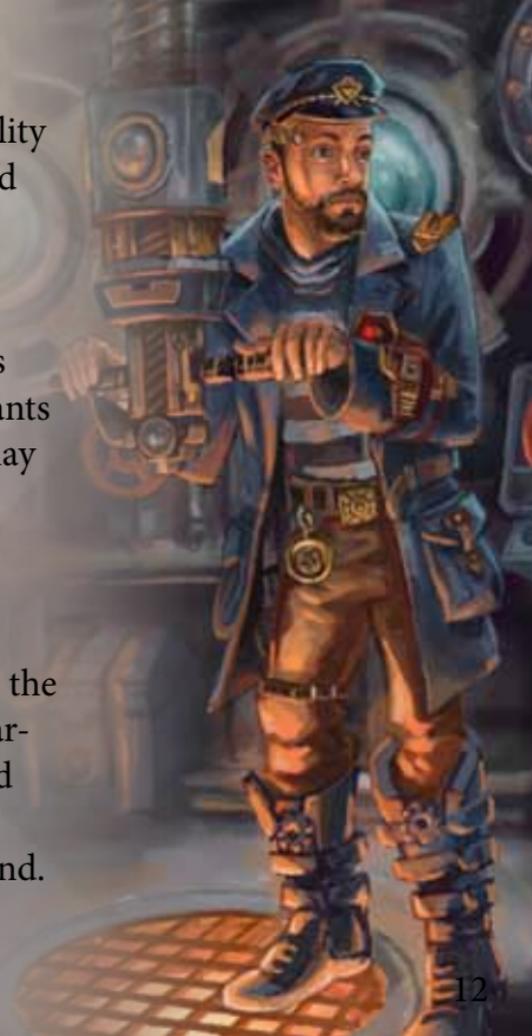
11. The Plague Doctor

Mysterious and grave, the Plague Doctor lurks in the shadows. Is he a good shepherd or a bringer of death? The Plague Doctor grants his Engineer the ability to walk among the dead. His Engineer may shuffle the discard pile and randomly draw four cards. He must keep at least two of the drawn cards.



12. The Vagabond

With nothing to his name except the oversized pack on his back, the Vagabond is a wandering marauder. At the beginning of the Quarter, the Vagabond's Engineer must give his two highest numbered cards (not special cards) to another Engineer at the table. If he wishes, he may hoard the entire Court Hand and add it to his hand. As the lowliest Engineer at the table, he also clears the cards after each trick.





Variations

7-12 PLAYERS (Party Variant)

Set up a Royal Table and a Renegade Table according to the diagram (see p. 4 for Royal Table diagram).

Each table will play independently with its own deck of cards and playmat. Each player randomly draws a start token and then sits by the character card with the corresponding number.

The rest of setup and play is the same as the 2-6 player game except for the following changes.



Tokens

Only one set of gear tokens (the starting tokens) will be used. At the beginning of each Quarter, stack the tokens for each table from lowest number on top to highest on bottom. When a player goes out, he takes the top token from the stack. At the end of each Quarter, players reseal based on the tokens they collected (the order players went out). All tokens are then re-stacked for the next Quarter.

Promotion and Demotion

At the end of each Quarter, the last two players at the Royal table to get rid of their cards are banished to the Renegade table. The second-to-last player takes the Submariner's seat (character 7) and the last player moves to the Inspector's seat (character 8). The reverse is true for the Renegades. The first two Engineers at the Renegade table to get rid of their cards are promoted to the Royal table. The first player reseats as the Jester (character 5), and the second player is given the chance to prove himself as Engineer to the Tea Boy (character 6).

Victory Condition

At the end of the 4th Quarter, the player at the Royal table who gets rid of his cards first becomes the Engineer to her Royal Majesty the Queen and is the winner of the game.





Variations (Continued)

1 PLAYER (Solo Variant)

Work your way up the Court ladder to become Engineer to the Queen before the Court Hand runs out. You start as Engineer to the Tea Boy and must beat the Court Hand's tricks to advance to the next Courtier. To win, you must beat the Court Hand (all three tricks) as the Engineer to each character, including the Queen.

Setup: Deal 12 cards to yourself, 22 to the Court Hand, and place the rest of the cards into the draw pile. Stack the 6 Royal Table character cards from 1–6, Queen on the bottom up to Tea Boy on top.

Play: Begin each round by exercising your character's privilege (if applicable) and drawing back up to 12 cards in your hand. The Court Hand will lay three tricks that you must try to beat

by playing the same quantity of matching cards in the set, but of a higher value. (Same method as multiplayer Steam Court).

If you can beat all three tricks, move them to the discard pile and start the next round by advancing to the next character and drawing back up to 12 cards.

If you are unable to beat all three tricks, discard the beaten tricks, leave the other tricks, and begin a new round with the same character. Draw back up to 12 cards and reveal cards from the Court Hand until three tricks are on the table.

If you are unable to beat any tricks, discard all three tricks and reveal three new ones from the Court Hand.

The Court Hand

If the Court Hand reveals ...

- duplicate numbered cards, stack them on top of each other to form a set. Reveal additional cards until three tricks are on the table.
- a Multiplier or a Masterstroke, treat it as a Multiplier (which adds one additional card to the set) and stack it on the left-most available trick. Reveal additional cards until three tricks are on the table.
- a 3/9 or 6/12 card, play it as the lower of the two numbers.

Character Privileges:

Tea Boy: Only at the beginning of the first round: Give up your 2 highest numbered cards (not special cards) and place them on the bottom of the Court Hand.

Jester: Once per round: Play a single card as though it were a set.

Time Traveler: Once per round: You may retrieve an already played card from the discard card pile.

Duke: You may match the number laid. (You do not need to lay a higher numbered card to win.)

General: At the beginning of the round: You may discard your lowest card and draw to replace it from the draw pile. You may stop the Court Hand from laying one trick (i.e. you only need to beat 2 tricks to advance.)

Queen: You may discard your lowest card or set of cards and draw to replace them from the draw pile.

End Game:

Beat the Court Hand as Engineer to the Queen, and you win the game! Do it with...

1–2 cards left in the Court Hand and achieve the rank of **Apprentice Engineer.**

3–4 cards left in the Court Hand and achieve the rank of **Skilled Engineer.**

5–6 cards left in the Court Hand and achieve the rank of **Master Engineer.**



Variations (Continued)

2 PLAYERS (Duo Variant)

Before dealing the cards, remove all of the 1s and 2s from the deck. In this version of the game, players start off as the Tea Boy and Plague Doctor (randomly draw start tokens to determine initial positions). The player to play all of his cards first will gain the privileges of the new character for the next Quarter (second Quarter characters are Plague Doctor and Alchemist, third Quarter: Alchemist and Duke, fourth Quarter: Duke and General). Prior to the start of the game, players should decide on the win condition: either the player with the highest gear point total or the player who finishes the 4th Quarter as Engineer to the Queen.

CLOCK CLIMBING (Alternate side of playmat)

For 2–6 player games, this alternate scoring method can be used. Players will be rewarded for taking tricks. Set up the Royal table using the alternate side of the playmat. After taking their seats, players place their start tokens on the outer rim of the playmat from lowest number to high-



est (as shown in the example). Players will use the same token throughout the game. The other gear tokens will not be used.

Play the Quarter like normal (strategies will change, but rules are the same). The Quarter ends after a second player has played all of their cards (third player for a 6-player game).

Note: Players must keep track of each trick they win.



At the end of the Quarter, beginning with the lowest character, players—one at a time—move their token one space around the clock per trick they collected. Use the outer circles the first time around the clock. The second time around, use the inner circles. A token cannot rest on the same space as another token. If a token would end on an occupied space, move it forward to the next open space. The first player to play all their cards earns 2 extra spaces, and the second player to go out earns 1 extra space.

Before starting the next Quarter, players reseal based on the order of their tokens (the player whose token is farthest ahead on the clock takes the highest character, second farthest, the second character, etc.). Then the next Quarter begins.

At the end of four Quarters, the player whose token is farthest ahead on the clock wins!



Frequently Asked Questions

What do you do when the dealt cards are uneven?

Every player should receive the same number of dealt cards. Extra cards go into the Court Hand. Players may have to trade cards using their privilege, resulting in uneven hands, but this is done after all the cards have been initially dealt evenly.

If the Queen's Engineer has a set of three 1s, does she have to give one of those away? “Undesirable” doesn't necessarily mean “lowest.” If you would prefer to get rid of another card so that you can play three cards on your first turn, then give whatever you want to that sniveling little Tea Boy!

When can the General stop someone from playing? Before or after a player lays his card/set (except for a lead card/set), the General may stop him and make him put his card(s) back into his hand. He must stop the player before the next player lays his card(s).

Can the General stop a player from playing a Masterstroke card? Yes. But stopping players from laying does not require them to pass or remove them from the trick. The player could still lay the Masterstroke card on his next turn.

If I'm the Tea Boy, do I have to give away my Masterstroke, Multiplier, 3/9, 6/12 cards? No. You only have to give away your highest “numbered” cards, not your special cards.

Can I pass even if I have playable cards? Yes.

Can I lay two cards with a Multiplier card? Yes. If a player started the trick with three 5s, you could lay two 7s and a Multiplier.

Can a player play over his own cards in the same trick (everyone else has passed, but the active player still has cards that are playable)? Yes. If a player laid two 10s and everyone else has passed, he could then play two 11s on top of his own cards.

When a player goes out, do we keep playing or start a new trick? When a player runs out of cards, the other players continue playing around the table as usual. If a player plays his last card and no one else can play on that trick, the player to his left starts the next trick.

If I pull a coup (with three Masterstrokes), do I get bonus points? Nope.

If two players try to exercise their privileges at the same time and they conflict, who goes first? The higher ranked player goes first.

What characters do you recommend for X numbers of players? See “Character Recommendations” on the next page.





Character Recommendations

- 3 Players**—Queen, Duke, Tea Boy
4 Players—Queen, Duke, Time Traveler, Tea Boy
5 Players—Queen, Duke, Time Traveler, Jester, Tea Boy
6 Players—Queen, General, Duke, Time Traveler, Jester, Tea Boy
7 Players—For 7 players we recommend staying at 1 table and adding/inserting the Inspector's seat between the Duke and Time Traveler.
8 Players—(Royal Table) Queen, Duke, Time Traveler, Tea Boy
(Renegades) Submariner, Alchemist, Pirate, Vagabond
9 Players—(Royal Table) Queen, Duke, Time Traveler, Tea Boy
(Renegades) Submariner, Alchemist, Pirate, Doctor, Vagabond
10 Players—(Royal Table) Queen, General, Duke, Time Traveler, Tea Boy
(Renegades) Submariner, Alchemist, Pirate, Doctor, Vagabond
11 Players—Remove one character card of your choosing
12 Players—Use all character cards



Thank Yous

Special thanks to David Lovegrove. This game wouldn't have existed if you hadn't introduced me to the mechanic, mentored and brainstormed with me as we worked on a dozen other games, and encouraged me to step up and give it a try. Thank you.

Tom Glass—you introduced me to the wide world of board gaming and your insights were invaluable as we put this one together. Thanks for being awesome.

All of our playtesters and Kickstarter backers: Thank you for the amazing support, feedback and encouragement!

Our wonderful wives (we each have one): Thank you for letting us waste far too much time playing games! We love and appreciate you! Thanks for helping us get to where we are!

Credits

This game was designed by Will Meadows and Ryan Pilz. Graphic design by Will Meadows. Illustrated by Greg Warner. SteamCourt font design by Jeremy Dooley. Rules edited by Melissa Delp.

Tantrum House Team: Will Meadows, Ryan Pilz, Kevin Delp, Ben Fields.

Soli Deo Gloria.



TANTRUM
House