

## Original Post (cambridgegames)

### NEW ROLE : ASSASSIN

A longstanding concern with Glory To Rome has been the ability for one or two players to pull off killer card combinations, give them control of the game and making it tough for anyone else to get back into contention. Since awesome and unexpected combinations is pretty much the point of the game, this isn't something we can really remove; we're more interested in getting the game to end quickly once someone has won a commanding position and then reset the scores by dealing another round.

The Surrender rule was an attempt to fix this--but in practice it's almost never used. So, as another approach, Carl's come up with the following suggestion:

- 1) Remove the surrender rule.
- 2) Increase the number of JACKs to number of players + 1--with the extra one starting in the middle available to be drawn. We may also need to change all of the JACKs to Ignoble given what they're about to get up to...
- 3) Any player may lead a Jack (or petition, etc.) as the Assassin role. The other players may follow (with Jacks, petitioning, etc.) or think as per normal.
- 4) After all players have thought or followed, the leading player reveals a single card from the deck to determine whether the Emperor is vulnerable. If it is not a Legionary, the card goes into his hand, and Nothing Happens. The turn ends and the leader card passes to the left (the right opportunity to make a move on the Emperor did not arise).
- 5) If the card IS a Legionary, the leader takes the card into his hand and the assassination attempt is made. The leader and the followers each perform Assassin "actions" by revealing another card from the deck each. If any of these cards are Legionaries, the assassination attempt succeeds, otherwise it fails. Either way, the game ends immediately.

### SCORING

If the assassination attempt fails, any player that carried out one (or more) Assassin action scores no points--any cards in their Vault are ignored for distribution of Merchant Bonus chips. The loyal players score as normal.

If the assassination attempt is successful, Nero is dead and victory is awarded to the player who killed him. If more than one player reveals a Legionary, those players score as normal, awarding merchant chips ignoring the Vaults of the other players.

### TECHNICALITIES

An Assassin "action" is revealing one card when the attempt is made (which only happens when the one primer card is red). This means that, as with any action, you may do nothing. I.e., you are not obliged to reveal a card when it comes around to you, as the player in the lead you could technically follow and then make the decision depending on how the cards revealed by players to your right look should the attempt actually happen.

The Ludus Magna and Palace each give you potential extra Assassin actions and thus extra cards to reveal, if you want them, and only if the primer card is red. A player does not gain anything extra by revealing more than one red card during the attempt, it simply counts as revealing a red card and being part of the successful assassination.

If the deck runs out during the assassination attempt, even as the last Assassin action is performed, the game ends immediately and all players score normally.

## Well Reasoned Response (gyges)

A couple of comments...

- a) I don't think I like the Assassin thingie. It seems flukey and too luck-driven. Do you really want to give the player in last place a 1 in 6 chance to win? Or have I misunderstood?
- b) Maybe another end-game condition would be an asset, but I don't know if it should be this one.
- c) Has the runaway leader problem you're trying to address come up frequently in games where you, Ed, were not playing personally? Not to put too fine a point on it, good sir, but you are *really* good at exploiting killer combos. This is a natural by-product, of course, of being intimately familiar with the game and having played so very many times.

Scores amongst players roughly equally familiar with the game turn out more equal, in my extremely limited experience. Further to which, you guys have managed to make a game that rewards planning and knowledge of the game system. There is nothing wrong with that. Own up to it. Live it. *Love* it. Look at the BGG top ten, and you will see games where an experienced player can mercilessly destroy novices. You can do two things with such games:

- Make the scoring hidden or semi-hidden. You have done this already with the "secret" vault and somewhat unpredictable merchant bonuses.

- Introduce new mechanics that give the game more luck. This seems to be the tack that the Assassination mechanic is taking, and I for one would counsel against it.

What you oughtn't have in a game is a situation such that the weaker players are literally prohibited from taking actions because of the dominance of the stronger players (a good example, I guess, is Backgammon--where a novice can be blocked and lose many turns due to the play of a master. Backgammon can be forgiven because it is short and has dice). Glory to Rome, like many other Euros, always has something for the weaker players to do (barring particularly bad card draws): "sure I can't win, but I at least finally finished my shiny vomitorium."

Oh, yeah: and noble (both in birth and character) Romans were often the very first to attempt assassinations.

Exhibits A and B: Gaius Cassius and Marcus Julius Brutus. Equestrians to the core. 😊

## Back (cambridggames)

This is still just an idea, not test yet at all, so it may bomb completely in practice but to answer a couple of your specific thoughts...

### Quote:

Do you really want to give the player in last place a 1 in 6 chance to win?

What we're trying to do is make the game end quickly once someone has won by developing a commanding lead.

Right now, apart from politeness and the vague risk of a Forum there's not much incentive for a winning player to grab the final sites and end the game.

As laid out, the mechanics for a losing player to win by Assassination are:

- 1) Spend ~ 6 turns leading Jacks in the hope of a favorable moment to launch an assassination attempt
- 2) Then and only then take a 1 in 6 chance of making the hit (so 5 in 6 of losing outright)

3) If you do succeed you've still got the risk that another player will muscle in and 'help' (e.g. 30% if two other players followed) beating you anyway if you're truly in last place.

So... the losing player gets a 10% chance of pulling off an upset (hey it's a chance) but if the assassination is attempted and 2 or 3 players join in the winning player has a 30% - 40% chance of losing an otherwise certain game.

This really changes the dynamics for the controlling player:

Right now if a player has a winning combo but is only 90% sure she's won, then unless there's a FORUM or some othe big card almost complete there's not much incentive for her to end the game--instead she should hang on working her combo until she's 150% certain she's beaten everyone. If, however, that means facing a couple of assassination attempts, each giving her a 5-7% chance of losing outright, it's much more of a toss up.

**Quote:**

Has the runaway leader problem you're trying to address come up frequently in games where you, Ed, were not playing personally?

Yes it has, and I've also been on the receiving end of it plenty of times (LUDUS MAGNA + 3 Merchants & BATH / GARDEN are both tricks I learned the hard way); you're certainly right that I have an advantage at the moment because I know the new cards better than the rest of you, but from experience it's a very temporary bonus

**Quote:**

games where an experienced player can mercilessly destroy novices

I have no problem with this in principle, as long as the game is still both challenging and fun (e.g. Titan)

If you look at the 4's & 5's we get, though, you'll see comments like:

*Similar to San Juan, but with more screwage, less balance, more than twice the duration, and less than half the fun.*

We believe a lot of these come from players who get stuck in situations where they can't seem to do anything, don't enjoy the game and decide not to play again (not so good)

## **Forth (gyges)**

**Quote:**

Right now, apart from politeness and the vague risk of a Forum there's not much incentive for a winning player to grab the final sites and end the game.

I suppose it's a question of play style. When I'm in the lead, I certainly want the game to end.

**Quote:**

So... the losing player gets a 10% chance of pulling off an upset (hey it's a chance) but if the assassination is attempted and 2 or 3 players join in the winning player has a 30% - 40% chance of losing an otherwise certain game.

I guess my problems are a) I dislike auto-lose conditions as much as I do auto-win conditions, and b) the assassination thingie is based entirely on chance, with only a little bit of reading the intentions of other players. I think introducing such a lucky element will do a disservice to the game, and not endear it to "serious" gamers (the target audience of the game). And I'll say

again, many well-regarded "gamers" games have a runaway leader problem far, far worse than seen here.

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a) I think the "balance" issues refer to card powers not being properly balanced against each other. This has been ameliorated significantly already, and would get even better if you listen to my sage words and ditch the forum (joke).

If they disliked the runaway leader problem, they'd probably say that the game had "a runaway leader problem."

b) "More screwage" isn't a pejorative, it's a descriptive term. Glory to Rome just has more player interaction, and hence potential to mess with other players, than does San Juan.

c) Glory to Rome will always last about twice as long as San Juan, assuming comparable levels of familiarity with the game. It's more complex and just takes longer.

In short, I guess I interpret the complaints to be complaints about different things. You could, of course, shoot out a GeekMail politely inquiring if another mechanism that ends the game prematurely giving a semi-random shot of victory would address their issues.

## **Back again (cambridggames)**

**Quote:**

In short, I guess I interpret the complaints to be complaints about different things

There are certainly some real balance issues whihc we're fixing (e.g. Prison) but there's also a very specific issue that I've seen sometimes in face to face demoes that matches much of the less positive BGG feedback we get:

Powerful combos (e.g. BAR / FORUM, BRIDGE / COLISEUM, ROAD / CATACOMB, BATH /GARDEN) are often perceived (and therefore described) as balance issues with the senior card, especially by new players who don't follow the interconnections of why "May Perform one PATRON action for each INFLUENCE" wins the game if the POOL is full and you also have a BATH and an AQUEDUCT, but may have much less impact in other circumstances.

This works itself out pretty quickly over a few hands as the strategy of "I'm building a (VOMITORIUM) because you won with it last time" fails to deliver victory, but many gamers rarely play the same game twice in a row, and so if the first game isn't great we probably won't get the second play...

At this point we really need to see how it playtests--Carl and I are hoping is that the threat of an Assassination attempt will mean that they rarely happen in practice, it'll be interesting to see how it works out in play.