

If You Can Keep It

Overview:

If You Can Keep It is a card game where the players take on the roles of legislators, passing laws that change the structure of the game itself. The starting player is called “President” and they present a card to the other players. The players may debate the proposal on the card and they may vote to adopt the rule change. A simple majority carries the vote and the rule change applies while the card is in play and faceup.* Once (x) cards in total have been presented and passed or once the deck runs out, the game ends (x is equal to twice the number of players plus one but no more than 13). The player with the most cards presented and passed wins the game.

Setup:

Shuffle all the cards together to form one deck. Then, deal three cards to each player. Choose one player to be the first “President”. If there is no consensus, the first President will be the oldest player. Decide on a group the “punishment” for breaking the Laws (i.e. The player cannot vote on the current card, they cannot take actions, they cannot become President, etc.)

Gameplay: Terms

During the game, players will take turns or “Terms” being the President. During their “Term”, the President may affect the law in a number of different ways:

- 1) The President may flip over one card that is in play.* The card may be flipped faceup or facedown.
- 2) The President may present a card from their hand to the group by reading it out loud and by placing it face-up for all players to see. The players may discuss the rule of the card as thoroughly as they like, but for a quicker game, we recommend a 3 minute debate. After the discussion, the President calls for a vote. Each player (including the President) may vote to accept or reject the proposed rule. If more than half of the players vote to pass the rule into Law, then the rule is played in front of the President. If more than half of the players vote not to pass the rule, then the President places the card in the discard pile. New Laws take effect immediately.

* A card is considered “in play” if it has been presented to the group and passed. Cards that are “in play” are placed face up in front of the player that presented the card. If a card is facedown, the card is still in play, but the players ignore the rule listed on the card.

3) The President may discard their hand in order to draw 3 new cards.

During the President's term, they may choose **up to two** of the above listed actions in any order, as well as any other actions allowed by faceup cards in play.

As the game progresses, the Players may have disagreements with regard to the interpretation of the rules. Unless otherwise specified, players must agree on the interpretation of the Law when the card is passed. The President may offer an interpretation, but a majority of the players must agree on it. Players should determine before the game starts what will be the penalty for breaking a Law (we suggest that they cannot vote in the next round). Some Laws passed may contradict previous Laws. If any Law passed contradicts a previous Law, turn the other Law facedown. These Laws may not be faceup at the same time.

After the President's term, the Presidency passes clockwise around the table unless otherwise specified by a Law in play.

End of Game:

The game ends after the final Law passes or if the last card is drawn from the deck. The Player(s) with the most cards in play in front of them win(s) the game and become(s) the Best President(s) in History!

Variant:

Each player begins the game with 3 cards in hand. At the beginning of each President's term, each player passes one of their cards to the President. Now, when the President presents a Law to the group, they must select one of these cards. If the Law passes, the owner of the card claims the Law and plays it in front of themselves. The President discards the rest of the cards and plays one of their own cards face down in front of themselves. These cards (faceup or facedown) count as "points". The game ends when one or more players has 3 points or when the deck runs out. The player(s) with the most points win(s) and become(s) the Best President(s) in History!

FAQ

What happens when two rules contradict each other?

When you pass a Law that contradicts another Law (i.e. “The President may choose who is allowed to vote before all arguments” and “The President cannot prevent any player from voting.”), the most recently passed Law must take precedence. Flip the other card facedown to prevent confusion. If the newly passed Law contradicts the rules of the game, the new Law takes precedence.

What happens if a player does not follow the rules?

The players must agree on a suitable punishment: sit in the corner, player cannot vote for a round, player cannot be President for a round, player must do 10 jumping jacks, etc. If it pleases the players, they may have different punishments for breaking different Laws. Obviously, use your best judgment based on the group.

What happens if the vote ends in a tie?

A simple majority (51%) passes the card. So, if the vote is split 50% to 50%, the card does not pass and it is discarded.

Can the President take the same action twice?

According to the rules, the President must take two different actions: present, flip, and/or discard. So the President can flip and discard, present a card and flip a card, present a card and discard. The President may not present a card and then present a card, discard their hand and then discard their new hand, etc. Unless a law is passed that allows for double actions, then the President must abide by the game rules.

The actions allowed by passed Laws may be taken by any player at any time as long as the prerequisites on the card are met (i.e. “The President may immediately pass a law if they discard two cards.”). If a player cannot legally meet the requirements of the action described on the card, they may not perform that action (i.e. they do not have cards to discard, they do not sit next to the President, they are not allowed to speak, etc.).

What if there is confusion about a law?

Players must agree on how a law is read. If the law reads a certain way, but a player finds a loophole, the players must (together) decide whether or not to allow it. As a general rule, players must decide on how to play the game “fairly”. Players may refer to discussion from the initial vote on that card as precedent to assist in interpreting Laws.

Spirit of the Game

Of course, the main goal of the game is to win. However, as the game progresses, players may find certain rules difficult to follow or some rules may be unjust. There are cards in this game that propose really bad ideas and other cards that present good ideas. Which laws are good and which laws are bad? Honestly, that is the beginning of a long conversation.

Ultimately, when people play this political game, it is easy to lose focus on the thing that truly matters; it is only a republic if you can keep it. The more laws you pass, the more ideas and stratagems that might help you win could also mean stepping on other people's rights and feelings. By giving yourself more power, you can make it difficult or even impossible for someone else to enjoy the game. The rules we inflict on each other can have some serious consequences and that idea is at the center of this game.

What constitutes fair play? What are the core values of this imaginary nation? How can we play to have fun and not harm our friend group in the process?

Every nation has had to tackle these questions and every nation has tried to answer them honestly and justly. In order to answer those questions, the founders must have had a foundation or a starting point from which all their answers proceeded. For the American founders, they summarize their foundation in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." These are the principles from which all laws originate.

However, when these principles are forgotten, even a generation later, all rights and laws come into question. Then, one violation of life or liberty may lead to more violations down the line until finally the whole republic collapses. For this reason, the founding Fathers built checks and balances into the law, restricting the government from violating even one person's rights without "due process" of law. While those checks and balances exist, between the powers of the Government and the powers of the People (and the power of the individual), the republic can remain.

Another important detail to remember is that laws have consequences; sometimes it can be tempting to take power for yourself or for your role, but then you have to remember that the power you take for yourself will remain after you leave your office. At that point, your competitors, your rivals, other players will have that same power you wielded for a short time. It might be prudent to forgo the temptation so as to preserve your own rights whenever you must pass the mantle of "President" on to the next person.

So, as you finish your little game with your friends and family, it might be good to reflect together on the fragility of your own empire. How easily can we turn on each

other for the sake of winning “the game”? If you get to the end of the game and the republic remains intact, good for you! You were able to preserve that which was worth preserving. Bring the game to a neighbor’s house or another friend’s house and play it again. Have these important conversations because there are some things that are worth keeping.

Sincerely,
Timothy Schoeneberg
RPG Games