

THE WATCHMEN

Keep the Lamps Burning



Created by Marcus Draper

Deskatur.com

Your watch begins

The story

For seven nights, your village depends on its watchkeepers. Storms damage homes, supplies run low, travelers need shelter, and danger sometimes reaches the gate. You choose where to help and how much to spend. The aim is protection and service, not defeating people for points.

What you need

One standard 52-card deck, with Jokers removed; d4, d6, d8, d10, d12 and d20; 30 small clear pieces; 24 chips; the village board; a pencil. If you have fewer clear pieces, write the numbers instead. All chips are the same shared Supply currency. A percentile die is optional and unused in this edition.

Play at a glance

One solo player controls the whole village. You may also share decisions with another person without changing the rules. Expect roughly 45-75 minutes for a first game; this is an estimate for testing, not a measured play time.

Your goal

Survive all seven nights. After Night 7 upkeep, win if Light is at least 1, every district has Strain below 4, and no more than two Needs remain unfinished. Otherwise the watch ends in a loss. A district reaching 4 Strain, or Light reaching 0, ends the game immediately.

A first playable edition

Alpha v0.1. These are complete rules for an original prototype. Numbers and difficulty still need human playtesting. Experience and success in this game do not measure faith, salvation, or God's favor. Created by Marcus Draper for Deskatur.com.

Prepare the village

Separate the cards

Put the four Queens face up as district leaders: 1 = Queen of Hearts, Households; 2 = Queen of Diamonds, Storehouse; 3 = Queen of Clubs, Workshops; 4 = Queen of Spades, Gate and Roads. Place them beside the corresponding board spaces. They never enter your hand or discard pile.

Prepare the encounters

Shuffle the four Kings face down into an Encounter deck. Keep it separate. Draw one King on Nights 2, 3, 5 and 7. Each King appears exactly once. A King is always a forced encounter; it is never a Resource or a recruitable helper.

Prepare your hand

Shuffle the remaining 44 cards together: 36 number cards (2-10), four Aces and four Jacks. This is the Resource deck. Deal seven cards into your hand. Start with 12 Supply chips and Light 4. All four districts start at Strain 0 with no Needs.

Make the tracks

Mark Night 1. Place clear pieces on Light 4 and each Strain 0. Use additional pieces or pencil marks to record each Need's Urgency and Progress. Maximum Light is 6; maximum Supply is 24. Excess gains are lost. Strain cannot fall below 0. Your hand limit is seven.

Empty decks and public information

When a Resource draw is required and its deck is empty, shuffle the Resource discard pile to make a new deck. If both are empty, stop drawing; never recycle cards from your hand. The Encounter deck does not recycle. Your hand and all board tracks are public. Do not look through either draw deck.

The nightly order

1. Refill hand to seven. 2. Roll the d12 Night Challenge and d10 Event. 3. Generate two Needs with d4 and d6. 4. On Night 7, roll the d20 Final Trial. 5. Resolve the scheduled King encounter, if any. 6. Take three village actions. 7. Perform upkeep. Night 1 starts with your dealt hand; do not deal seven more.

Cards, help, and supplies

Number cards

A card's Help value is its band, not its printed number: 2-4 = 1 Help; 5-7 = 2 Help; 8-10 = 3 Help. For a task or encounter round, commit one or two number cards and add both Help values. If at least one card has a useful suit for that roll, add a single +2 suit bonus. A second matching card gives no extra suit bonus.

What each suit means

Hearts: compassion, care and safe escort. Diamonds: provisions and materials. Clubs: labor, repairs and firm defense. Spades: watchfulness, scouting and safe routes. Each Need uses its district's suit. Encounter approaches list their useful suits separately.

Jacks: Messengers

A Jack is a helper, not a number card. Add one Jack to a roll if its suit is useful for that roll: it grants +2, then is discarded. You still must commit at least one number card. You may add only one special card (Jack OR Ace) to each roll.

Aces: Steady Hands

An Ace allows one reroll of the d8 after you see it, keeping the new result even if lower. Any Ace suit works. Discard the Ace; it adds no Help and gives no suit bonus. A roll may use either a Jack or an Ace, never both. Aces cannot reroll Events, Urgency, the Night Challenge or the Final Trial.

Queens: Local Leadership

Each Queen grants +1 to one Work on a Need roll in her own district per night. Declare it before rolling and mark her used, even if the attempt fails. It cannot assist encounters, Relief or Gather Supplies. Clear all Queen used markers at the next night's start.

Spending chips after a roll

After the d8 (and any Ace reroll), you may spend Supply to add +1 per chip: up to three chips on a village roll, or up to two on an encounter round. Decide before applying the outcome. Chips are spent whether you succeed or fail. You cannot spend more than you have. All committed cards and special cards go to the Resource discard after the roll, on either outcome.

Needs and village actions

Generate a Need

Roll d4 to choose a district. Roll d6 for Urgency: 1-3 = Urgency 1; 4-5 = Urgency 2; 6 = Urgency 3. Its Target is $7 + \text{ceiling}(\text{d12 Night Challenge} / 4) + \text{Urgency}$. Thus the base before Urgency is 8, 9 or 10. Record its Target, Urgency and Progress 0. Targets stay with their Need; a later night's d12 does not replace them.

Two spaces per district

A district can hold two Needs. If a third would appear, do not create it; instead increase that district's Strain by 1 immediately. Check for loss at 4. You may choose which empty Need space to use. Give the Need a fitting name from the district table; the name adds no extra rule.

Work on a Need - one action

Choose one Need. Commit one or two number cards; its district suit is useful. Add Help, the single suit bonus if earned, optional Jack or Queen bonus, its existing Progress, and a d8. An Ace may reroll the d8. Spend up to three chips afterward. If total meets or exceeds its Target, remove the Need, reduce that district's Strain by 1 and gain 1 Supply. If short, add exactly 2 Progress to that Need, capped at Target minus 1. Keep the Need. There is no automatic completion from Progress alone.

Relief - one action

Choose a district with Strain above 0. Roll a village attempt with Target 8; Hearts and Clubs are useful. Commit one or two number cards; special-card and chip rules apply. Success reduces its Strain by 2. Failure reduces it by 1. Relief never removes a Need or changes its Progress.

Gather Supplies - one action

Roll a village attempt with Target 8; Diamonds are useful. Success gains 4 Supply; failure gains 2 Supply. Spend chips on the roll only if you want to. Apply the 24-chip cap. Gathering never changes Strain.

Tend the Lamp / Rest - one action each

Tend the Lamp: spend exactly 2 Supply and gain 3 Light, capped at 6; no roll or card cost. You need at least 2 chips to choose it. Rest: draw up to two Resources, stopping at seven cards; no roll or chip cost. You may repeat any action. You may pass unused actions. You cannot take extra village actions.

Night challenge and event tables

d12: Night Challenge

1-4	Base Target 8: add each new Need's Urgency.
5-8	Base Target 9: add each new Need's Urgency.
9-12	Base Target 10: add each new Need's Urgency.

d10: Night Event - resolve before generating Needs

1	Hard wind: lose 1 Light.
2	Spoiled provisions: lose 2 Supply, or all remaining if fewer.
3	Damaged road: roll d4; that district gains 1 Strain.
4	A busy evening: generate one extra Need now using d4/d6.
5	An anxious household: roll d4; that district gains 1 Strain.
6	Quiet preparation: draw one Resource, if below hand limit.
7	A neighbor's gift: gain 2 Supply.
8	Fresh oil: gain 1 Light.
9	Willing hands: reduce Strain by 1 in one district you choose.
10	A welcome donation: gain 3 Supply.

Names for your Needs

Households / Hearts	A family needs bread; welcome a traveler; care for someone weary.
Storehouse / Diamonds	Replace lamp oil; preserve food; replenish traveling provisions.
Workshops / Clubs	Repair a roof; restore a well; strengthen a damaged doorway.
Gate and Roads / Spades	Guide late arrivals; mark a safe route; check the village boundary.

Events are immediate

Apply track caps and check losses after every event. An event that gives an extra Need uses this night's d12 result. If an event gives a draw at the seven-card limit, ignore it. Supply never falls below 0. No event costs a village action.

Forced encounters

When a King arrives

On Nights 2, 3, 5 and 7, draw the top King after generating Needs (and after the Final Trial on Night 7). Normal village work pauses. Set Threat 4, Pressure 0 and Escape 0. The encounter takes up to three rounds and does not consume your three village actions. It does consume cards and Supply. No village actions, including Rest, can be taken during it.

One approach each round

Choose Stand Firm, Protect and Withdraw, or Seek Peace. Commit one or two number cards; roll d8 and apply useful-suit, special-card and chip rules. Queens and Need Progress never assist an encounter. At most two Supply chips can improve this roll. You must have at least one number card. If you cannot or choose not to commit one, the encounter immediately fails.

Stand Firm

Useful suits: Clubs and Spades. Meet the King's Stand Target to reduce Threat by 2. On a shortfall, Pressure increases by 1. Threat at 0 resolves the encounter safely: gain 2 Supply. Defending means holding danger back and driving it away; no kills are counted.

Protect and Withdraw

Useful suits: Hearts and Spades. Target 9. Success adds 1 Escape; failure adds 1 Pressure. At Escape 2, you bring the threatened people home safely: lose 2 Supply (minimum 0) and add 1 Strain in the King's affected district. Ignore any failure penalty. Withdrawal resolves the encounter; it is not an encounter failure.

Seek Peace

Useful suits: Hearts and Diamonds. Target 11. Try this approach at most once per encounter. Success resolves the entire encounter safely, with no Supply gain or loss. Failure adds 2 Pressure. If the encounter continues, choose a different approach next round.

Success, failure and timing

After each round, first check Threat 0 or Escape 2 or successful Peace. If none resolved it, Pressure 3 ends the encounter in failure. If still unresolved after round three, it fails. Apply the King's failure penalty once, then discard that King beside the Encounter deck. Reset Threat, Pressure and Escape. If the village survives, take all three village actions. You may mix approaches; Threat and Escape both retain their progress within the encounter.

The four Kings and the final trial

King encounter table

King of Spades	Raiders at the Gate. District 4. Stand Target 10. Failure: +2 Strain in Gate and Roads; lose 1 Light.
King of Clubs	Ambush on the Road. District 3. Stand Target 9. Failure: +2 Strain in Workshops; lose 3 Supply.
King of Diamonds	The Seized Caravan. District 2. Stand Target 10. Failure: +2 Strain in Storehouse; lose 4 Supply.
King of Hearts	The Household Under Threat. District 1. Stand Target 9. Failure: +2 Strain in Households; lose 1 Light.

d20: Night 7 Final Trial

Roll once after that night's two Needs and before its King. This is an extra event, not an attack roll. No Ace reroll is allowed.

Final Trial outcomes

1-4	A fierce gust: lose 1 Light; roll d4 and add 1 Strain there.
5-8	More arrivals: generate one extra Need using d4/d6 and this night's base Target.
9-12	A costly journey: lose 3 Supply (minimum 0).
13-16	An offer of help: draw two Resources, stopping at seven; gain 1 Supply.
17-20	The village stands together: gain 2 Supply and reduce Strain by 1 in one district you choose.

No hidden combat rules

All Kings begin with the same Threat and use the same Peace and Withdrawal targets. Their Stand targets, affected districts and penalties differ. There are no weapon lists, damage dice, critical hits or wounds in this edition. The d20 changes the final night's situation; it never overrides an encounter result.

Upkeep, victory and difficulty

End-of-night upkeep - in order

First, increase Strain by 1 for EACH unfinished Need in its district. Check after every increase: Strain 4 means an immediate loss. Second, unfinished Needs with Urgency below 3 gain 1 Urgency and 1 Target; Urgency 3 Needs gain neither. Existing Progress stays unchanged. Third, lose 1 Light; Light 0 means an immediate loss.

Dawn after Night 7

If still in play, count unfinished Needs. Win if there are zero, one or two and every district is below Strain 4 with Light at least 1. Three or more unfinished Needs means a loss: the village could not keep up. Record the outcome and your remaining Light, Supply, Strain and Needs. There is no bonus for hoarding chips or using force.

Beginning another night

Advance the Night marker, clear Queen used markers and refill your hand to seven. Do not discard your hand at dawn. Keep all Needs, their Progress, Strain, Supply and Light. Remove encounter counters after each encounter. Start a completely new game by resetting everything, separating the cards again and shuffling both decks.

Choose a difficulty before setup

First Watch: start with 16 Supply and Light 5. Generate only one regular Need on Night 1; two on later nights. All other rules apply. Standard Watch: 12 Supply, Light 4, two regular Needs every night. Perilous Nights: 10 Supply, Light 3; every King's Stand Target is +1. Never add extra King draws: four encounters remain.

Shared-table play

Two people may share the hand, chips and three actions. Discuss choices; one person rolls and the other maintains tracks, swapping next night. This is the same solo puzzle with shared decisions, not a separately balanced multiplayer mode.

Record useful feedback

Note difficulty, outcome, night reached, encounter outcomes and which rule felt unclear. Report whether losses felt like decisions you could improve or simply unavoidable rolls. These alpha rules need real table sessions before balance can be claimed.

Guided first night

Practice setup

Use First Watch. Choose this seven-card hand: 8 of Hearts, 6 of Clubs, 9 of Diamonds, 4 of Spades, 2 of Hearts, Jack of Diamonds and Ace of Clubs. Put Queens in their districts. Shuffle all other non-King cards as the Resource deck and shuffle the Kings separately. Start with 16 Supply and Light 5.

Use these fixed rolls once

For Night 1 only, substitute these results for your dice: d12 = 5 (base Target 9); d10 = 2 (lose 2 Supply, leaving 14); d4 = 1 (Households); d6 = 4 (Urgency 2). First Watch generates only this one regular Need on Night 1. Its Target is 11 and Progress is 0. There is no King on Night 1.

Action 1: Work on the household Need

Commit the 8 of Hearts: 3 Help. It matches Hearts, giving +2. Declare the Queen of Hearts for +1. Use d8 = 3. Total: $3 + 2 + 1 + 3 = 9$. Spend two Supply chips to reach 11. Complete the Need and gain one chip. Supply is now 13; Strain stays 0. Discard the 8 of Hearts. Mark that Queen used.

Action 2: Gather Supplies

Commit the 9 of Diamonds: 3 Help, +2 matching suit. Add the Jack of Diamonds for +2 and use d8 = 2. Total 9 meets Target 8. Gain four Supply, reaching 17. Discard both cards. This illustrates that a helper supports a number card; it cannot work alone.

Action 3: Tend the Lamp

Spend two Supply, leaving 15. Add three Light, capped at 6, so Light goes from 5 to 6. No cards or roll are required. Upkeep: there are no unfinished Needs, so Strain stays 0. Lose one Light, leaving 5. Advance to Night 2 and clear Queen markers. You have four cards left; draw three to refill to seven.

Now play normally

Use real dice from Night 2 onward, generate two regular Needs and draw your first King after them. Keep your practice state or restart with a random hand. This example teaches arithmetic; it is not evidence that every opening will be easy.

Encounter example and quick reference

Raiders at the Gate

Suppose you draw King of Spades. Set Threat 4, Pressure 0, Escape 0. In round one, Stand Firm with a 7 of Clubs (2 Help), +2 matching suit and $d8 = 5$: total 9. Spend one chip to meet Target 10. Threat falls to 2. Discard the card.

A difficult second round

Stand Firm with a 3 of Spades (1 Help), +2 suit and $d8 = 4$: total 7. You could spend at most two chips, which would only reach 9. Choose not to spend. Pressure rises to 1; Threat stays 2. Discard the card. No village action has been spent.

The village holds

In round three, commit an 8 of Clubs and a 5 of Spades: Help 3 + 2, one +2 suit bonus, $d8 = 3$, total 10. Threat falls to 0, so the encounter resolves safely. Gain two Supply, discard both cards and the King. Take your three village actions. If this round had failed, the encounter would have reached its three-round limit and applied its penalty.

Your roll formula

Number-card Help + one useful-suit bonus (+2) + optional Jack (+2) + optional Queen (+1, Work only) + existing Progress (Work only) + $d8$ + Supply spent. Ace rerolls the $d8$ in place of using a Jack. Meet or exceed Target to succeed.

Remember the limits

Three village actions per night. Seven-card hand. One or two number cards per roll. One special card per roll. Up to three chips on village rolls, two on encounter rolls. Three rounds per King. Peace once per encounter. Two Needs per district. Light cap 6; Supply cap 24. Strain 4 or Light 0 ends play immediately.

Where the dice belong

$d4$ chooses a district. $d6$ gives a new Need's Urgency. $d8$ resolves work or an encounter approach. $d10$ gives each night's Event. $d12$ gives that night's base Need Target. $d20$ gives the extra Final Trial on Night 7. Printed card numbers do not get added directly to dice.