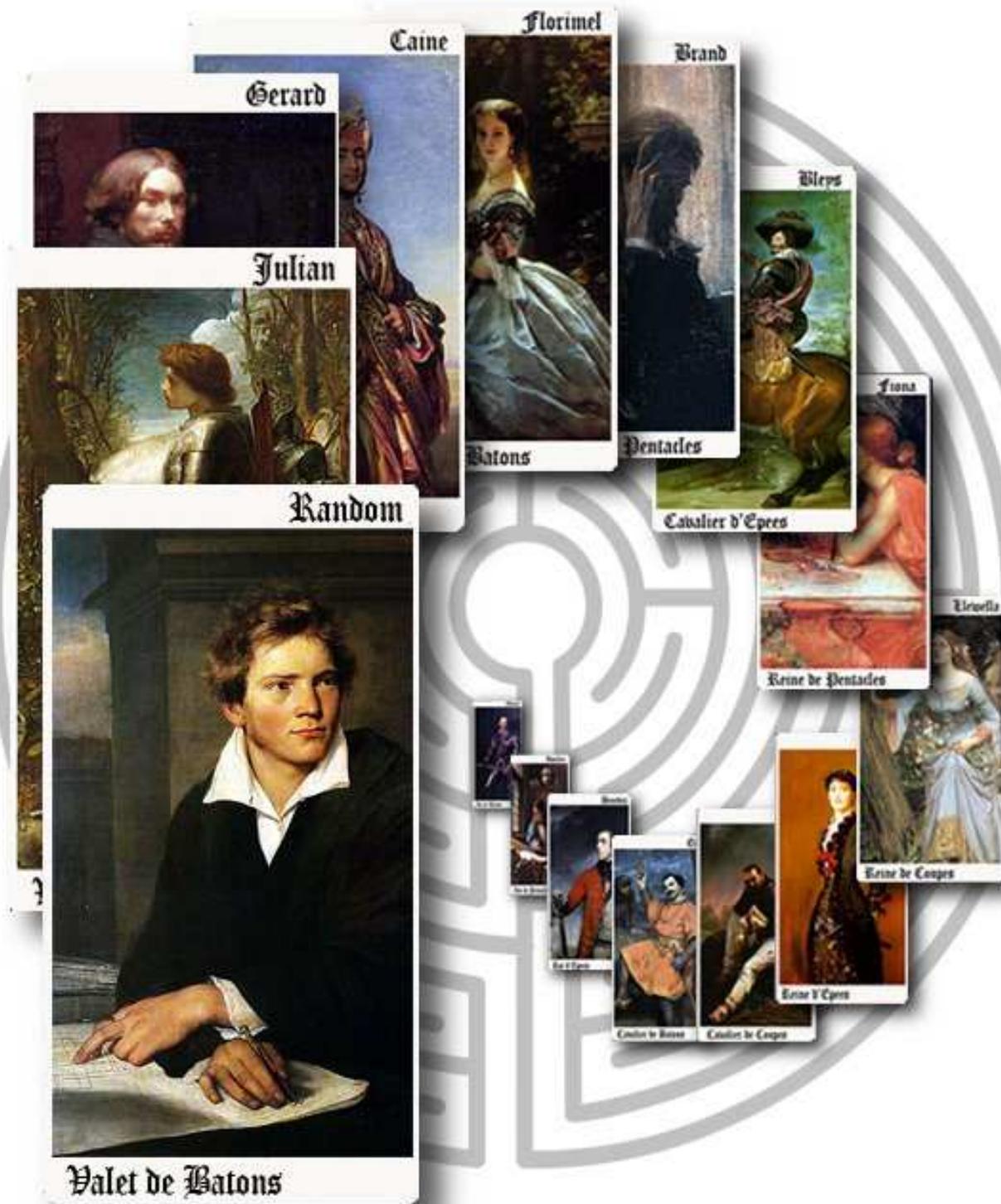


Dine Princess



A fine remix of Amber RPG,
by Kheiren



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Nine Princes, a “system does matter” rewriting of *Amber the Diceless RPG*
(published in 1991)

by Khelren

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Foreword

Family matters in *Amber*. And moreover, this question: “can I really trust my kin?” The answer might be “no”, because you’re a bunch of bastards... but who knows?

Purpose

Yes, they are a beautiful bunch of bastards but nevertheless Princes do follow rules of etiquette.

Unfortunately, this idea was not very present in *Amber the Diceless RPG*. Actually, even if it is a great game, it has, let’s say, a kind of powermongering comic book flavor which was not (in my point of view) relevant. That’s not exactly what you can read with the first novels. In *Amber DRPG*, the point is to be the biggest badass and not a Prince who must follow rules and duties.



To betray, yes indeed, but with style, you know...



Ludography

Nine Princes was not created with one or two “indie” rpg mechanics in mind. The game mechanics have come step by step.

This is why I give behind the rules insight inside “Author’s notes” boxes. Here I show some similarities with other indie games. This is mostly only a way to make you read them. Be curious. Try something different. Like them or not, but try storygames and/or narrativism-oriented games.

Amber in a few words

For those who don’t know either the *Amber* novels or roleplaying games, in a very few words, Amber is the only point of reality known in the multiverse. You are going to play one of the princes of the royal family governing Amber. You have passed the Pattern, a mystical labyrinth, thus giving you the capability to travel between worlds, called Shadows.



It’s a royal family wherein you play dirty. Taking the throne from Oberon, your father, may be your most short-term plan.

Above all, Amber is a supernatural and fantastic setting where everything is possible: you can dance with faeries, chase Alice in Wonderland, fight werewolves, then go to a sci-fi world and meet at last the Knights of the Round table. All in the same day.

The only limits are those of the Princes’ fancy... and so, yours.





Legal notices

Nines Princes has been created during the “*Vieux pots, nouvelles soupes*”, 2nd edition (2012) contest.

Copyright

Amber the DRPG and the *Princes of Amber* saga remain the property of their respective authors. The novels have been written by Roger Zelazny. The roleplaying game was published by Phage Press in 1991 for its first edition, and mainly written by Erick Wujcik.

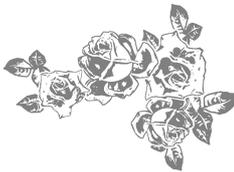


Erick Wujcik being unfortunately dead and Phage Press seeming to no longer exist, it is said that a new publisher have claimed the *Amber* property rights. However, it doesn't have any website or contact either.

Nine Princes is merely a humble way to rewrite *Amber the DRPG* in a more storygame way, by Khelren (<http://dragondigital.free.fr/>). For any comments (of which I am very keen), please email me at: dragondigital@free.fr

If you haven't guessed yet, which is doubtful, English is not my native language. *Nine Princes* is a translation I have quickly made from the original *Neuf Princes*. It can be found also on my website. If you read French, I suggest that you read the latter. Your eyes won't bleed anymore.

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Link

For more details, notably on the contest: <http://www.narrativiste.eu/>





Calling a Prince

When you create your Prince, you start with five Trust points and five Plot points. Spend them wisely.

Calling your Prince

First of all, each one tells his name. Everyone is a Prince who may be: Benedict, Eric, Corwin, Bleys, Brand, Caine, Julian, Gérard, or Random.

Each Prince puts in front of him his Trump.

The GM is playing the others Princes, or more likely only those he will name during the Bids or who will appear during the Scenes.

If these names mean nothing to you, that's perfect. Just make them legendary.

On the contrary, if you know them damn too well, forget about it. Play them anew. Don't try to follow how they appear in the novels. You are set before the Corwin cycle, so give them a fresh start. Even the genealogy doesn't need to be exactly the same, if you want to.

If two or more players want to play the same character, you should as the GM help them find an agreement. Or, why not let them play the same character? However, they'll have to give you a good explanation, now or later.



About the others

If you are familiar with Amber, you shall notice that a lot of them are currently missing. For example: Oberon, Martin, Osrice, Finndo, Merlin, Ganelon, all the characters from the Merlin saga and, more important, the princesses, from Fiona to Dara.

Nobody, not even me, prevents you from playing them. But, hey, unlike the nine princes, they are not the main protagonists, are they? Besides, you should have plenty of game time, even without them.

Just remember two things: forget the novels and play them anew; and everything that's revealed by the books (notably during the Merlin cycle) is not true anymore.

Naming your strengths

Then, the bidding begins. The first to speak is the player next to the GM, on his left. After that, the Bids go clockwise, including the GM.

Each Prince tells why he is well-known. Everyone can retort that:

- He is better
- He is better but in a specific case
- He is doubtlessly not quite as good

The one who chooses to be better has to skip the next bidding. If someone overbids again, then he has to skip two biddings. And so on.

"Of course I am the best swordsman Amber can count!" Benedict opens.

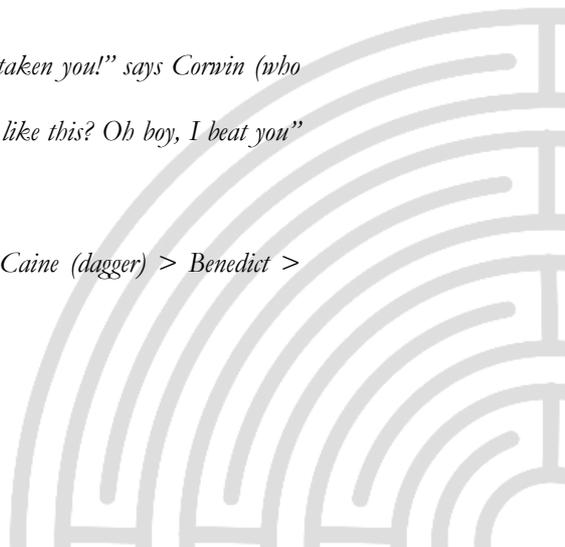
"You wish! I trained myself so hard in Shadow Earth and now I have overtaken you!" says Corwin (who will skip the next bidding).

"During a duel, agreed. With any weapon, I guess so. But with a fine dagger like this? Oh boy, I beat you" whispers Caine.

"(sigh) Useless. I am fine: just behind." That's Bleys talking.

And finally, Brand is not interested at all.

So everyone writes down the following bids for "Swordsmanship": Corwin, Caine (dagger) > Benedict > Caine, Bleys > Brand.



Everyone, depending on his ranking, writes down a score in the Domain corresponding to the actual bidding. Domains are: Wands (social), Swords (fighting), Pentacles (mental) and Cups (physical). If you have more than one Bid depending on the same Domain, you add the scores.

"Swordsmanship" is obviously a "Swords" Domain. So Brand writes down 0, Bleys and Caine 1, Benedict 2 and Corwin 3.

They will be your Attributes: Wands is more prosaically called Influence, Swords is Warfare, Pentacles is Psyche and Cups is Endurance.

The first time you speak is free. But if you want to speak furthermore, to start a new Bid or to take part in it, you'll have to pay one Trust point. In the above example, that's why Brand remains silent.

Declaring your Plans

Now, each Prince chooses what he is aiming to achieve more than anything.

Brand sees himself as a mad sorcerer's student, maybe Oberon's secret ally. He hesitates between Pattern and Trumps and finally chooses the latter. He declares: "To be a living Trump!" Bleys is curious: "What do you mean by a living Trump?" Brand smirks: "No idea. We'll see during play..."

Then each Prince chooses what kind of relationship he has with the Prince on his right.

Corwin without a doubt says: "To kill a hateful Prince". He glares at Eric, a sadistic smile lurking on his face. "Nothing personal, dear brother... or rather yes, let me explain to you why."

And finally, each Prince chooses something of the utmost importance for the Prince on his left.

Eric is thinking a while and then: "For Caine, I see defending Amber." Caine sighs. "Yes, yes, I admit, call me a dumb sentimental but I could die for our kingdom..."



Author's notes

For the character creation, I wanted to keep the Amber's auction. In the meantime I wanted them to be less mathematical. Everyone is announcing facts and during play, facts are disputed. "Is truly Benedict the most fearsome warrior? Or is it only a legend?"

Somehow you can find this in Universalis, by Ralph Mazza and Mike Holmes. "Facts" are bought with tokens. And facts can be about anything: characters, story, and setting. They are also created collectively.

To behave like a Prince

Noblesse oblige, the demeanor of a Prince is not the same as a villain. Well, in any case, he should not act like that or appear to act like that.

If a Prince has a right to life and death upon any Shadow dwellers, upon a Prince, things are different: he has to follow specific rules.

A Prince cannot kill another Prince.

A Prince must keep his word.

A Prince will never offer apologize to another Prince.

A Prince will never act like a subordinate to another Prince.

A Prince will never mean disrespect to another Prince.

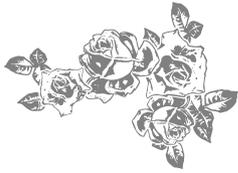
Breaking these rules is always possible; however one Trust point must be paid.



Powers and Resources

The Amber royal family, bestowed with great powers, can travel through worlds and forge their very destiny.

Each Prince can buy Powers: Pattern for two Plot points and each Trump trick for one mere point; and Resources: one Trust point to buy a Shadow, an Artifact or an Ally.



Pattern

Amberite Princes can find what they deeply want wherever they want, as soon as they are outside Amber. With the power of the Pattern, they can find places and items of their desire.

However, the journey is always a bit uncertain. If a Prince has more Plot points than Trust points, traps and obstacles will stand in the way. In that case, his psyche has a bad influence on the place or on the item. They will probably reveal in time harmful qualities.

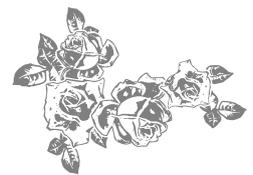
In the Shadow of his desire, a Prince can alter probabilities, find items of his desire and change some details.

Random wants to find haven on some Shadow paradise. But the journey is harder than expected: he is attacked by a group of Amazons, and then he has to play at riddles with some Faeries. Finally, he got lost in a mazy cave. No doubt he is full of guilt, after the death of Morgantbe, his lover, he caused (Plot > Trust).

To use Pattern in game, a player will have to search a corresponding image using an Internet search engine. The description should fit with the image but besides that, he can freely add whatever he wants.

Trump tricks

Anyone can use a Trump. If you wish to speak to someone or even join him, you just have to possess his Trump. It can also be a place you wish to get to.



Tricks allow you to use Trumps more efficiently, for example in order to spy people or to draw Trumps.

Caine acquires the scrying Trump trick so that he can spy on those he possesses the Trump. He can locate them, feel their mood, and even hear their conversations.

Brand wishes to be a Trump artist. Only an Artist can create new Trumps but nevertheless he has to know people or places he wants to picture.

To use Tricks in game, a player must have created the Trump beforehand. For Shadow and Artifact Resources, players should create their Trump.





Shadow

Owning a Shadow means to know how to safely travel to it, maybe to possess its Trump, to be able to find here whatever you want and to never ever face any unpleasant surprise. Furthermore, any local use of the Pattern must be granted by the owner.

First of all, you must define your Shadow. How's time flowing: faster or slower than Amber? Is magic or technology useable? In that case, only the owner can truly master their use.

Bleys direly needs a Shadow where he can find an army to seize power. A secret headquarter with a faster time flow would be perfect. He thinks of Acheron. On these lands, he is like a god and totally unbeatable. No one can enter without his consent.

Any Scene located on this Shadow gives a bonus to its owner: he is considered to be one rank higher, in any Domain.

Artifact

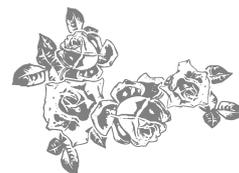
A Prince could have found, during his previous journeys, an item or a creature of great power. This Artifact is now bound to the Prince's legend.

Unlike standard items, Artifacts may travel across Shadows and even stay permanently in Amber without disappearing.

An Artifact depends on a Domain: he gives a higher rank to its owner.

Corwin wears Grayswandir, a Pattern deathdealer blade. Its Domain is Swords.

Eric bears the Jewel of Judgment, a beautiful red stone in a necklace. Its Domains are Pentacles and Wands, but its cost is two Trust points.



Ally

The only concern of a Prince is its own goals. However, sometimes, Princes might work together to achieve bigger goals.

Thus, if a Prince spends one Trust point, anyone (even another Prince) becomes his Ally.

This Ally gains one Plot point.

The one who wants to betray this alliance must spend one Plot point. It cannot be in the same Scene he has been bought as an Ally.



ules of narration

Stories in *Nine Princes* are told collectively by all the players, GM included, with shared and almost equal powers.

Trump dealing

Every player writes on a Trump (or on a simple piece of paper) a single or a few words: it can be a creature or an item, an action or peculiar circumstances, some good or bad fortune.

Trumps are then shuffled and everyone picks one card, keeping it hidden in front of him.



Scene

The first Scene should be described by the GM. Most of the time, the story begins in Amber, where the good king Oberon no longer rules. Obviously, any Prince can be here. You can use this Scene to remind or tell everyone what is Amber, how the known universe looks like, its peculiarities, and who the Princes are. During this Scene, nothing really prevents them from beginning to conspire and scheme.

Then the Princes go clockwise to call a Scene, the first being the player on the GM's left.

The one who calls a Scene must clearly explain the purpose of this Scene, what he wants to gain at the end of the Scene and from whom. It is the Stake.

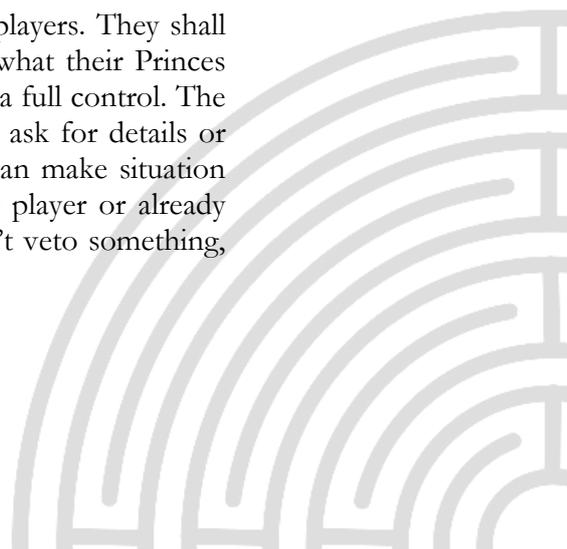
People linked to this Stake must be present during the Scene. Likewise, if a Prince has somehow a Plan which seems connected, he can be present.

Any Prince can be present if he spends one Trust point.

Then the Scene is set: where? when (considering the previous Scene for example)? and eventually which non-protagonist characters are present?

The Scene can now be played.

The events are mutually decided by the players. They shall speak only for their Princes, describing what their Princes accomplish; for this part, each player has a full control. The rest is created collectively. Everyone can ask for details or play a non-protagonist character. They can make situation harder but try not to contradict another player or already something present in the narration. Don't veto something, just deal with it.





Conflict

So, the Prince calling a Scene wants something... It can be solved peacefully, the players negotiating and finally agreeing to the consequences. If no agreement can be found, a conflict therefore arises.

The winner of the conflict is:

1. First of all, the one who possesses a Trump corresponding to the conflict
2. Then, the one who has the highest ranking in a corresponding Bid
3. Finally, the one who has the best Domain corresponding to the conflict

If even, it is a draw and the situation stands as a *statu quo*.

If the Stake is not resolved, the Prince who has called the Scene gains one Trust or Plot point.

If a Trump has been used, the player keeps it in front of him, revealed, but cannot use it anymore. He draws another Trump.

The art of lying

Princes don't play by the rules. Let's see how exactly.

Princes are twisted. When you think they are trapped, suddenly it appears that everything have been forecast since the beginning. And unsurprisingly, they already have planned retaliation.

Spending one Plot point, a Prince can alter a Bid.

Let's go back to the point we have left the Bids: remember that Corwin was the best swordsman, even better than Benedict? A duel between them arises: "No buts, no ifs, winning is on my side, dear brother" Benedict replies coldly: "Have you really been supposing that I have been resting on my laurels?" He spends one Plot point and now outmatches Corwin. So that everyone writes down "Swordsman": Benedict > Corwin, Caine (dagger) > Caine, Bleys > Brand. However, Domains remain unaltered.

Princes are liars. More exactly, they tell stories fitting their view.

Spending one Plot point, a Prince can change anybody's narration. If a Prince is directly targeted, he gains one Trust point. If he chooses to not face the consequences of the effect, the narration remains unaltered and the Plot point is given back.

Julian is chasing Corwin. The track will be successful because Julian is a bloody master huntsman. Corwin interrupts: "No, no, no, it is definitively not what happened..." He decides to find a safe place in Rebma, where Julian cannot pursue him. He spends one Plot point and Julian gives up, winning one Trust point. However, Eric spends also one Plot point. "Rebma? Do you mean where you are outlawed because you have caused the Queen's daughter death?" Corwin declines. Too risky. At this moment, Eric could have got back his point but Random then says "That's fine for me, I'll take it! Boo me, I'm a murderer" He gains one Trust point.

Author's notes

From the beginning, I have wanted the Pattern to be some sort of Internet search engine. Including new technologies was one of the criteria of the contest.

I have also wanted Trumps to be physically tangible for the players, a really good mean to urge them to create game material.

Trump dealing (reminding the way Amberites try to foresee the future in Amber novels) has been inspired by Archipelago by Matthijs Holter. There are kind of collectively created characters' main events that will resolve during play and fate cards used to add hazards and random events.

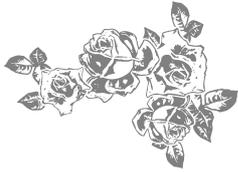
Trust points, a mechanic to ally with and be betrayed by other players, can be found in The Mountain Witch by Timothy Kleinert and, in France, in Tenga by Jérôme "Brand" Larré.

Lastly, the gain of a token if the player doesn't obtain what he wants from the narration can be found in some playtest reports of Hillfolk by Robin D. Laws (or at least, as I have understood them).



Chronicles

Amber universe have been expanded with novels; in the same way, Princes will change over time and games.



From a Scene to a Chapter

Plans are made to put players together on good leads. The more you'll play, the more complex and profound stories will be.

When it is a player's turn, it is up to him to decide what is at stakes. Maybe he would like to directly resolve his current goal, for example to destroy the Pattern? But, as you can only obtain something from somebody, how can he get that? Maybe he would have first of all to find how to destroy the Pattern? So, who knows that and why would he be willing to give that detail?

If Stakes are direct, games will be shorter. In that case, you can play Chapter after Chapter quite quickly. Swap Princes between players, pick previously absent Princes.

On the contrary, if Stakes are more precise, plots might be richer and games will last longer.

Play a cycle

At the beginning of a new Chapter:

Each Prince may put one point from a Domain to another.

Each Prince may discard one Resource in order to get back one Trust point or a Power for one Plot point.

Every Prince who has used and kept a Trump shuffles it back into the pile and gains one Plot or Trust point.

If a Prince has been killed during a previous Chapter, he can come back without Bids, Powers or Resources. His Domains remain. He starts all over with five Plot points and five Trust points.

If players swap Princes, let them exchange their character sheet. They are invited to play completely differently their new character.

New biddings are made, with a free turn for everyone. New Plans are decided. Every player draws a Trump.

A new Chapter opens...

