

KING OF SIAM

FOR 2 TO 4 PLAYERS AGES 12 AND UP

BY PEER SYLVESTER







Siam, 1874. The King of Siam, Rama V Phra Maha Chulalongkorn, is very open to European ideas and wants to modernize the country. His initial reforms, however, meet open resistance from the higher nobility. Soon a serious power-struggle breaks out between the Royalists, the Lao from Siam's North, and the Malays from Siam's South.

While this is happening, Siam is a target of the European powers, Great Britain and France, both of which are looking to reduce Siam to a colony in their empires.

It is obvious to all struggling factions that maintaining the country's freedom and open expression of their dissent are in conflict and the result is a tightrope walk. Siam must preserve the appearance of tranquility, despite all the turmoil beneath the surface. Siam's motto, "Unity brings Happiness", is dangerously close to being an empty saying.

1 Game components

-  1 game board,
-  54 »followers« (18 yellow, 18 red, and 18 blue)
-  1 pack of playing cards consisting of:
 - 4 sets of action cards (8 cards each);
 - 4 playing aid cards.
-  1 die cut sheet with:



8 control markers
»Rama«
(yellow)



8 control markers
»Lao«
(red)



8 control markers
»Malay«
(blue)



4 control markers
»British«





4 markers
»King«





8 province tiles


2 Basic concept

 KING OF SIAM is a game for 2 to 4 players. In the 2-player and 3-player game, everyone is playing against everyone else. In the 4-player game, the players are in two partnerships, with the players sitting opposite each other as partners.


 By playing action cards, the players try to give one of the 3 factions (Rama, Lao, Malay) control of Siam. Simultaneously, they try to increase their own influence over the winning faction.


 At the end of the game, the player with the greatest influence over the winning faction is the winner. In a 4-player game, the partner of the winning player shares the win.


 But be careful! It is possible for Siam to become a British colony. In that case, the victory conditions are different.


 A 2-player game takes about 30 minutes to play, the 3-player game 45 minutes, and the 4 player game about an hour.


3 Setting up the game

 In the two-player-game, two followers of each colour are removed from the game.


 Every player receives one set of action cards, consisting of 8 cards.


 Each player randomly draws 1 playing aid card. On this card, there are 2 followers depicted in the upper left corner. Every player receives the followers depicted on their card and places them in front of him, visible to everyone. **NOTE:** The playing aid No. 4 is used in the 4-player game only; the player with this card receives the same followers as his left neighbour.

 The game board shows Siam and its 8 provinces. Each of the 3 factions has one **home province**. A faction's home province is marked with a depiction of two followers of that faction's colour.


 Four followers are placed in each province:


- In a home province, 2 followers of the corresponding colour and 2 randomly chosen followers are placed;
- In every other province, 4 randomly chosen followers are placed.


 The remaining followers are placed in a common pool on the Siam coat of arms (lower-right corner).


 The 8 province tiles are placed in random order, one in each box numbered "1" to "8". The tiles are placed face-up, so that the province name is visible.

4 Course of the game

 Each game consists of 8 power-struggles. In each struggle, the factions fight for the control of one province. The power-struggles are conducted in the order of the laid out province tiles: The first struggle is for the province in box "1"; the next struggle is for the province in box "2"; and so on.

 The players take turns. The first player in the game is the one with the lowest number on his play aid, and play proceeds clockwise around the board. In his turn, a player chooses either to play **ONE** action card (see section 5) or pass.

 A player who passed in his previous turn is permitted to "re-enter" when it is his turn again. A player is never required to play an action card (he may pass every turn). As long as a player holds action cards he is never forced to pass.

 When all players have passed in a row, the power-

struggle ends by checking the contested province to see which faction has gained control over it (see section 6).

After one power-struggle is completed, the starting player in the next struggle is the one sitting clockwise from the player who passed last.

	Alfred	Benjamin	Charles
1.	passes	passes	action
2.	passes	action	passes
3.	passes	passes=Finish	

Example: The upper table shows the general course of a power-struggle. After all 3 players have passed in a row, the power-struggle is completed and it is determined which faction controls the contested province. Benjamin was the last player to pass, so the starting player in the next power-struggle will be Charles.

5 Actions

If a player decides to play an action card, he lays down **ONE** of his action cards in front of him, stacking it on top of his previous played cards, so that only the top card is visible.

The action on the played card **must** be executed. **EXCEPTION:** It is permitted to play an action card which is wholly or partly illegal to execute. In such a case, the action of the card is executed as far as legally possible.

Note that the played action card can influence any province. It is not legal, however, to put followers into a province which is already controlled by a faction or by the British due to a completed power-struggle.

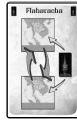
After executing the action, the player has to take any one follower from any one province. He puts this follower in front of him, thus increasing his influence on the faction the follower belongs to. The follower has to be taken, even if the action is illegal (partially or completely) to execute.

Played action cards are never returned to a player. Therefore a player can play a maximum of 8 action cards per game.

IMPORTANT: The very last action card of a game may be played only if the player (or his partner) achieves victory by executing it.

Example: In a 3-player-game, all action cards except one have been played. This very last action card (i.e. the 24th action card) is held by Alfred. He may only play the card if he achieves victory with it.

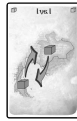
The actions in detail:



Maharacha (“King” in the Thai language). The player changes the order of the power-struggles by swapping 2 face-up province tiles. On one of these 2 tiles he puts a “King” marker. **NOTE:** a tile already marked with a “King” cannot be swapped.



Khon Thai (“Free People”). The player moves one follower of each faction from the common pool into a province. (**NOTE:** if a faction has no followers in the common pool, no follower of that faction is moved.) Followers from different factions can go into different provinces. — This action card has two copies per set.



1 vs. 1. The player swaps 1 follower in a province with 1 follower in another province. The two provinces do not have to be adjacent. It is permitted to swap followers of the same colour.

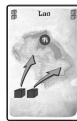


2 vs. 1. The player swaps 2 followers in a province with 1 follower in another province. **The two provinces must be adjacent.** It is permitted to swap followers of the same colour.

IMPORTANT: If two action cards “1 vs. 1” are played one after the other, it is not permitted to use the second card to “undo” the swap of the previous one; that is a player may not simply swap followers of the same factions between the same provinces as before but in the opposite direction. The same is true for two action cards “2 vs. 1” which are played one after the other.



Rama. The player puts 2 Rama followers from the common pool in one or two provinces. He can only choose provinces which are **adjacent** to an already controlled Rama province or which are **adjacent** to the Rama home province. In the latter case the Rama home province may not be controlled by another faction nor by the British.



Lao & Malai. The Lao and Malai versions of the Rama action card.

6 Completing a power-struggle

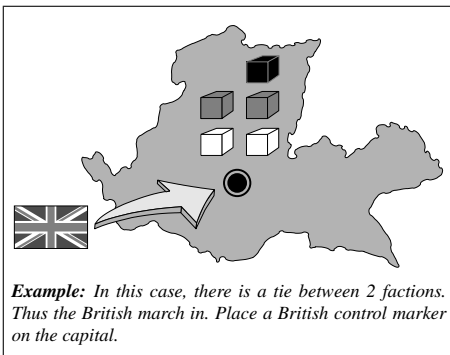
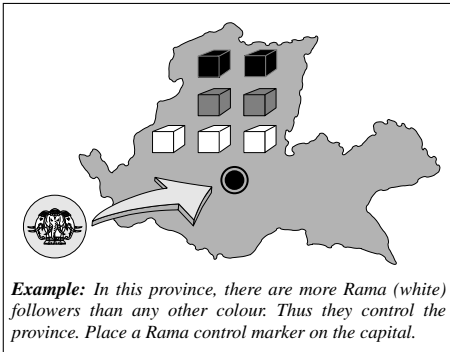
When all players have passed in a row, the contested province is checked to see which faction gains control over it.

The contested province is the one whose province tile is face-up in the lowest numbered box.

The faction with the most followers in the province gains control over it. One of their control markers is placed onto the province capital.

If there is a tie between 2 or all factions, then the British march in and take control. This is true even if there are no followers of any faction in the province. One British control marker is placed onto the province capital.

In both cases, all followers in the province are moved to the common pool. After that, the province tile is turned face down and the power-struggle is completed.

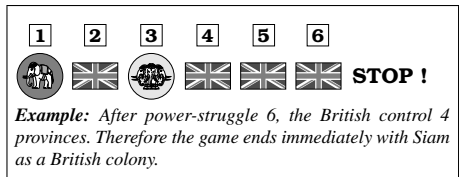
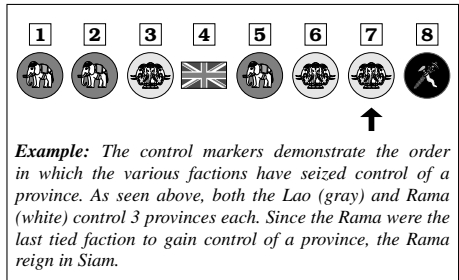


7 Winning the Game

Which faction reigns in Siam?

The game ends immediately whenever the British control 4 provinces. Siam is then considered a British colony. **NOTE:** British domination of Siam is quite rare.

If Siam does not become a British colony, then the game ends after all 8 power-struggles have been completed. In this case, Siam is reigned by the faction which controls the most provinces. If factions are tied, the winning faction is whichever of the tied factions was the last to gain control of a province.



Who is the winning player?

If Siam is a British colony, the winning player is the one who has the most complete sets of followers. (A set consists of one blue, one red, and one yellow follower each.) If there is a tie, the tied player who played an **action card last WINS**.

NOTE: In a 4-player-game, the victory conditions are slightly altered, see section 8.

If Siam is **not** a British colony, the winning player is the one who has gathered the most followers of the winning faction. If players are tied, victory goes to the tied player who has the most followers of the second ranked faction. While there is still a tie, the still-tied player who played an **action card last LOSES**.

Alfred **Benjamin** **Charles**

Example: Siam became a British colony. Alfred and Benjamin have gathered 1 complete set of followers, while Charles has gathered 2 complete sets. So he is the winner.

8 The 4-player-game

In a 4-player-game, the 2 players sitting opposite each other are one partnership. Communication between players is not allowed (even if they are partners). Players may not even show each other their remaining action cards. Every player gathers his own followers.

The winning player is determined according to the standard rules. When a player wins, his partner wins with him. **EXCEPTION:** If Siam is a British colony, then the teams combine their followers to count their complete sets. If there is a tie, the team with the player who played an **action card last WINS**.

Example: In a 4-player-game, Siam is a British colony. Alfred and Alice have together 7 blue, 3 red, and 6 yellow followers. This are 3 complete sets. Benjamin and Bertha have 4 complete sets, and therefore they are the winners.

Example: The Rama are reigning in Siam and the Lao are second ranked. Alfred has 4 yellow followers, Alice has 3, Benjamin has 5, and Bertha has 1. Therefore Benjamin has won, and with him Bertha.

1 **2**

Alfred **Benjamin** **Charles**

Example: The Lao are reigning in Siam and the Rama are second ranked. Alfred and Benjamin have the most Lao followers, but are tied. Since Alfred has more followers of the second ranked Rama, he is the winner.

Designer's Notes

Douglas Adams once wrote: "What will happen, will happen." Certainly this was so in the design of KING OF SIAM: I found it irresistible.

Everything started in late 2003 when I was in Siam, nowadays Thailand. I had been working there for over a year as a teacher, and I was curious to learn more about Thai history. But that wasn't easy, since the International schools where I was working did not teach Thai or Asian history, but only European history. Thus, there were no books for me to read and no teachers for me to question. However, what information I was able to gather fascinated me. Especially intriguing was the fact that Siam was successful in averting colonization. By the start of the 20th century, all of Southeast Asia was colonized except for Siam. How did the Siamese accomplish that?

The idea for a game was born. What about a game where different factions fight for domination in Siam, but every player has to take care that the British won't march in? Since there was never an open civil war in Siam, a political area-control game seemed the best fit. I thought that the conflict would be to influence the high nobility. The initial idea was that the British would invade if a power-struggle ended in a tie. In the event of a British win, all players would lose. I thought that this mechanism would simulate the cautious manoeuvring of the factions, which tried to avoid open conflict at all costs. The British would intervene if a civil war was threatening the kingdom. Civil war would result from a power vacuum - that seemed logical to me. Unfortunately, this initial game design did not work, and was not very original either. So, I put it on hold.

After my return to Europe and move to Berlin, I came in contact with several game designers. I started to play their and my prototypes in private sessions. It was in one of these sessions (playing another game) that I had the break-through idea: The players should not have their own pieces on the board, but they should predict which faction will win - just as it is written in the rules now. I then had the idea to divide Siam in 8 provinces and introduced 8 actions which seemed plausible to me. Originally, the Malays, Lao and Rama had individual special actions. It was more elegant, however, to simplify this in the form of the cards "Rama", "Malai", and "Lao". Since I had 8 provinces (each with their own power-struggle) and 8 actions, I decided that these 8 actions should be enough for the complete game. This reduced the "chaos" in the game

and made it very analytical. Basically, the first prototype of the second generation design was very like the game you now have in your hands. Initially, however, the four player game was not played by partnerships. One critical problem with the 4 player game was that with 4 players and only 3 factions the game tended to end up as a tie too often, and another problem was that the individual player did not have enough control over game flow. Since I am a fan of partner games, the introduction of the 4 player rules was a logical change, and it did improve the game. (By the way: Some players prefer to play the partner game with open communication. I am not a fan of this variant, but if players want to, they are free to try it. The use of a secret or coded information should still be forbidden, with all communication open so that all players can understand it. Players may state what cards they have, but they may not show them.) The last polish was given to the game with the aid of Richard Stubenvoll: a few rough edges of the design were smoothed, the borders were adjusted to better match those of 19th century Siam, and the game was tilted more towards historical accuracy.

The 3 chosen factions had never been altered since the initial idea for the game: In the South of Siam, there was the Islamic realm of Kedah. In South Thailand, there is even today a lot of friction between the Muslims and the Buddhists. So this faction was an obvious choice. As a second faction, I initially thought of the Burmese, but there never was any Burmese influence in that period. Furthermore, conflict with the Burmese was always of an external and military character, which was not a fit with the political nature of the game. Part of what is now Laos, however, was then part of Siam; and the Laotian people were not always happy about that. Given this, I opted for the Lao. (By the way, the final game board correctly shows the home province of the Lao. In the prototype versions, the Lao home province had moved well to the west. This was a result of the fact that the first prototype gave two home provinces to each faction. This was later changed to only one home province, because it gave game play more variability.) The third faction was obvious again: The Royalists, i.e. the Rama, who are the most important faction as per the historical facts. In the early design stage, their importance was reflected by fixing the power-struggle for Ayutthaya as the last and 8th power-struggle. Again, this was changed in order to open up game play more.

It may be of some interest that intuition and induction were able to capture an historical truth. It was only

when doing the final graphical layout that I found the 19th century Siam coat of arms. These show exactly the chosen 3 factions – so to say as Siam's constituting ethnic groups. I want to add that historically the Malays should be pink and not blue. For reasons of colour psychology and better visual differentiation, blue was used instead. I hope you are able to forgive us this small inaccuracy.

Today, Thailand consists of more than 40 provinces, and in the year of 1874 there were even more. For the game, I had to merge many of the provinces. My choices were based on which provinces were important in the past as well as which provinces are best-known today.

Thai people are quite famous for their "*Mai pen Lai!*" ("*That doesn't matter!*") – This saying demonstrates quite a very relaxed attitude towards the difficulties of life. This kind of relaxed attitude will help you in playing KING OF SIAM, too. The trick is to know which province you should give up and which you should never give up. Remember also that you cannot hold the majority of all factions. Sooner or later you will have to decide which faction you want to accumulate. The action card "Maharacha" is quite often underestimated, though it is a quite powerful tool. By swapping the order of two power-struggles, a power-struggle which is favourable for you may be decided earlier (so that you can, for instance, make good use of a "Rama"-card directly after it). But the "Maharacha"-card allows you also to "freeze" a province containing a lot of troublesome followers (i.e. of a faction not favoured by you). Note that the number of followers is limited. Especially in the four player game this is one of the keys to victory. Once you have an advantage of two followers of a faction, your control of it is quite safe. At that point, there is almost never any need to gather more followers of this faction. A better idea is to accumulate followers of a second faction, both to pressure on your opponents and to give yourself a second way to win. Of course it is always wise not to waste your actions too early, especially if your favoured faction seems likely to win.

In this spirit: *Mai pen Lai!*

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 – Many thanks to all of you!

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