

THE WAR MACHINE

PART 2: THE OFFICIAL MASTER RULEBOOK

SECTION 1: SETUP & THE "STANDING ARMY"

1. **The Decks:** Use a standard, shuffled 52-card deck. Divide the deck evenly into two face-down stacks of 26 cards each. Each stack is a player's "Standing Army."
2. **Absolute Secrecy:** The Standing Army remains a complete black box. No player ever has permission to look at, peek, or dig through their Standing Army pile under any circumstances. Cards must be drawn strictly one-by-one from the top.
3. **The Opening Hand:** At the start of the game, each player draws exactly 8 cards one-by-one from the top of their Standing Army to form their hidden hand. Players look at their own cards but must keep them completely hidden from the opponent.

SECTION 2: THE CORE GAMEPLAY LOOP

The game is played in a series of rounds consisting of a Bet and a Reply.

1. **Step 1: The Stage & The Bet:** The active Bet Person selects any card from their hand and places it face-down on the table. Once a card is placed face-down and let go of, it is locked; the player cannot pull it back or change their mind. The Bet Person has a mandatory window of 0 to 20 seconds to use speech, voice inflections, posture, and mental projection to influence the opponent. Before their time expires, they must verbally state exactly one of two phrases: *"I will win."* or *"I will lose."*
2. **Step 2: The Reaction & The Reply:** The Reply Person processes the performance, selects a card from their hand, and places it face-down on the table (also locked once let go). They must immediately state their evaluation of the Bet Person's claim by saying exactly one of two choices: *"I agree with you."* or *"I disagree with you."*
3. **Step 3: The Reset:** Once both statements are locked, both face-down cards are flipped over and resolved via the Master Matrix. The round is finalized, cards are distributed, and only then do both players simultaneously replenish their hands back to exactly 8 cards by drawing one-by-one from the top of their Standing Armies. New cards can only be used in the next round.
 - **The Mid-Round Emergency Valve:** If a series of consecutive ties forces a player to play their 8th card mid-round, they are granted explicit permission to draw a temporary card from the top of their Standing Army to break the deadlock. They must reset their hand to exactly 8 cards before the next round begins.

SECTION 3: THE MASTER MATRIX OF TRUTH

When cards are revealed, values rank traditionally (3 up to Ace as highest), with one critical exception: **A 2 completely beats an Ace.**

#	Bet Declaration	Card Result	Reply Declaration	Who Was Correct?	Cards Go To...
1	"I will win"	Bet Higher	"I agree"	Both Correct	Bet Person (Takes 2 played)
2	"I will win"	Reply Higher	"I agree"	Both Wrong	STAY ON TABLE (Pot Grows)
3	"I will win"	Bet Higher	"I disagree"	Only Bet	Bet Person (Takes entire pot)
4	"I will win"	Reply Higher	"I disagree"	Only Reply	Reply Person (Takes entire pot)
5	"I will lose"	Bet Higher	"I agree"	Both Wrong	STAY ON TABLE (Pot Grows)
6	"I will lose"	Reply Higher	"I agree"	Both Correct	Reply Person (Takes 2 played)
7	"I will lose"	Bet Higher	"I disagree"	Only Reply	Reply Person (Takes entire pot)
8	"I will lose"	Reply Higher	"I disagree"	Only Bet	Bet Person (Takes entire pot)
9	Any Phrase	TIE (Equal)	Any Phrase	Neither	STAY ON TABLE (Pot Grows)

SECTION 4: THE ASYMMETRIC GRACE PERIOD

1. When one player completely empties their Standing Army stack, they enter a grace period. They do not lose. Instead, they unlock their face-down winnings pile, now known as the "Spoils of War."
2. To keep the game fair and neutralize photographic memory, the player is permitted to openly study all cards in their Spoils of War and **hand-sculpt** their hand back up to 8 cards. Once a card is moved from the Spoils into the hand, it cannot be put back.
3. The Termination Phase does not start yet as long as the other player is still drawing randomly from their remaining Standing Army.

SECTION 5: THE TERMINATION PHASE & GRACE BY RETIREMENT

The formal Termination Phase activates the exact moment BOTH players have completely exhausted their primary Standing Armies and are both operating out of their Spoils of War.

1. **The Attrition Engine:** Every single time a player selects a card from their Spoils of War to bring into their hand, they must immediately select a second card from their Spoils of War and permanently retire it from the game face-down. Retired cards are completely out of play for the rest of the match.
2. **The Underdog Grace Rule:** If the retirement rule would force a player to burn their last remaining card in their Spoils of War, they are granted immunity by grace. They do not retire it; they may add that final lone card to their hand to attempt the ultimate comeback.
3. **Hand Depletion:** Hand sizes will naturally shrink below 8 cards as total resources dissolve. A player with fewer than 8 cards is perfectly safe and continues playing standard rounds.
4. **Ultimate Victory Condition:** A player is defeated, and the opponent wins, only when it is their active turn to put down a card on the table and they have 0 cards left to play.

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