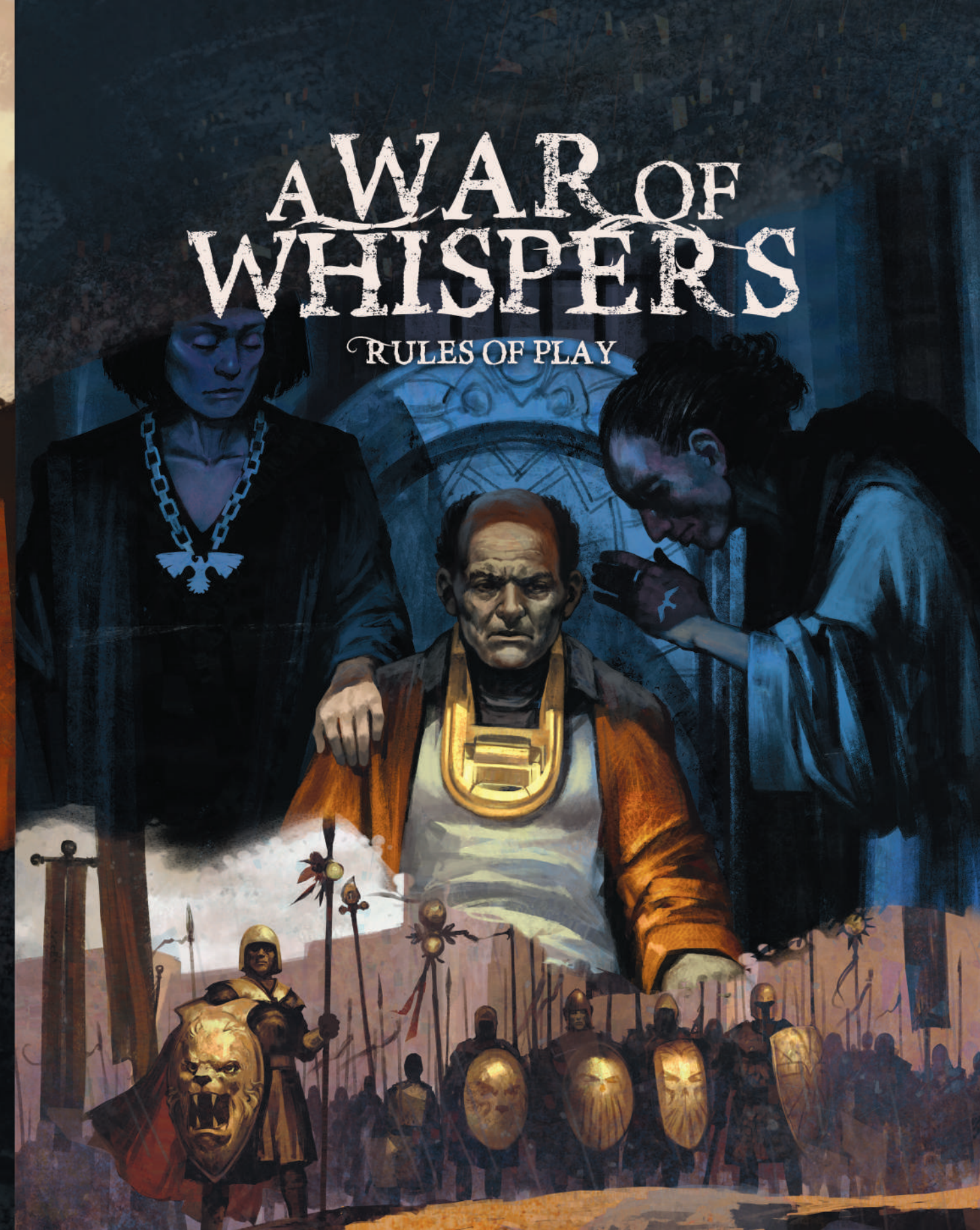

A WAR OF WHISPERS
RULES OF PLAY

Five mighty empires are at war for the world.
Their banners flying boldly, they march towards glory.
The ferocity of the Bear. The pride of the Lion. The endurance of the Horse.
The reach of the Eagle. The power of the Elephant.
Come the dawn, the world will be remade, and one empire will rule over them all...



But it is in the shadows that true power lies... a Serpent, a Spider, a Raven, a Rat.
This is not a war for the mighty, with battles waged on the open field.
This is a war fought by empires unseen—a war of whispers.



THE PALE RAVEN

Empires rise and fall, but the everlasting and growing knowledge of the Pale Raven endures. It is a wise ruler that would seek such sure counsel. The Pale Raven seeks no reward but that their knowledge survives and grows.



THE SUPPLICANT SPIDER

They walk the halls of power as lowly servants, heads down, unfeared and unloved. They are spiders hidden in high corners, spinning a web in service to no king or lord, but in service of the downtrodden and forgotten.



THE CULT OF THE RAT

A mysterious new religion has arisen among the royal families of the five great empires. The Cult of the Rat tempts the rich and powerful to join their feast, and of course to contribute their worldly goods and influence.



THE ENDLESS SERPENT

The followers of the Endless Serpent encircle the globe. The Serpent often takes a more physical approach to coercion. The goals of the Serpent are many, and seemingly not all nefarious, but no outsider can make head or tails of them.











OVERVIEW

A War of Whispers is a competitive board game for 2 to 4 players. Five mighty empires are at war for the world, but you are no mighty ruler. Instead, you'll be playing a secret society who is betting on the results of this war while pulling strings to rig the results and ensure your bets pay off. *A War of Whispers* is a game of deep strategy, hidden agendas, and shifting loyalties.

GOAL

You start the game with 5 loyalty tokens, each corresponding to one of the 5 different empires. You will bet randomly on a loyalty value. Your primary goal is to ensure that when the game ends, the empires you are most loyal to control the most cities across the globe.

CREDITS

Game Design
Jeremy Stoltzfus

Game and Creative Development
Dann May
Brenna Noonan

Art
Tomasz Jedruszek

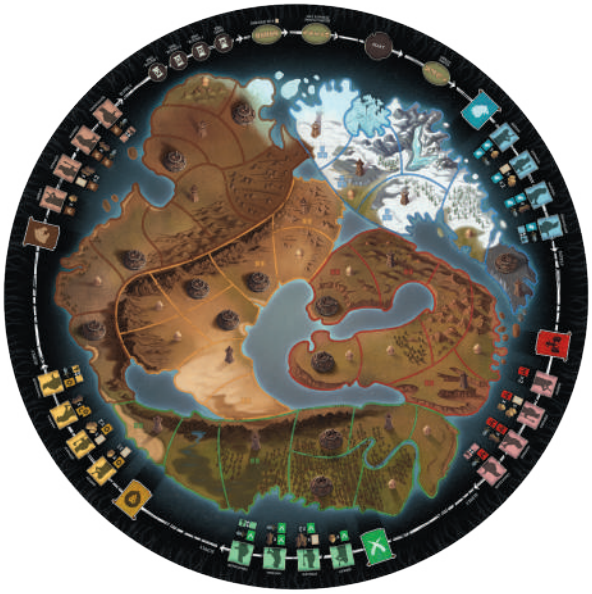
Art Direction and Graphic Design
Dann May

Kickstarter and Marketing
Brenna Noonan

Executive Producer
Dan Yarrington

Published by Starling Games

COMPONENTS



1 Game Board



40 Empire Cards
(8 x 5 kinds)



100 Banner Cubes
(20 x 5 kinds)



36 Agent Tokens
(9 x 4 kinds)



4 Turn Trackers



4 Player Boards



1 First Player Token



20 Loyalty Tokens
(5 x 4 kinds)

SETUP

Player Boards and Tokens

To start the game, each player chooses a matching **player board** (A), set of **agents** (B), and **loyalty tokens** (C), and sets them aside. Place the "1" turn marker beside the "Start" space on the board (D) and the other three turn markers near the turn tracker (E).

The Five Empires

Once that is done, it's time to set up the empires. There are 5 **empires** in the game, each represented by a different color and animal: The Bear empire (blue), The Lion empire (yellow), The Horse empire (brown), The Elephant empire (green), and the Eagle empire (red).

For each empire, place all **banners** (cubes) of that color beside the board in a pile near their associated councils to create the banner reserve piles (F).

The **empire cards** are then split into 5 **empire decks** and placed beside each of the corresponding empires (G).

The Map

The map on the game board is broken down into different colored **empires** which are further broken down into regions. If any region on the map contains a small banner image, it indicates that a banner of the color matching this empire should be placed there. For example, a yellow region with two yellow banner images receives two yellow Lion empire banners.

First Player

Determine which player will go first by any means. That player takes the **first player marker** (J). The first player marker will change hands throughout the game, and the player who holds it will be referred to as the **first player**.

Loyalty

During setup, you and your opponents will each need to place your initial **loyalty** bets on the five empires. To do so, shuffle your five **loyalty tokens** and randomly place them face-down on the five indicated **loyalty** slots on your player board. **After placing your bets you may peek at them, and may do so at any time during the game.** Each loyalty token represents a bet on one of the five empires. Loyalty tokens and scoring are described in detail on page 8.

MAP SYMBOLS



Farm: Referred to in council position actions. Expands the supply limits in a region to 6.



Fort: Referred to in council position actions. Adds 1 banner to the defending army during an attack.



City: Referred to in final scoring. See page 8, Loyalty Tokens and Scoring.



Banner: Marks the regions an empire's starting banners are added to before the game begins.


E
4
3
2
D
1
F
x20
G
G
x20
F
F
x20
G
G
x20
F
F
x20
G
J
A
B
C
POINTS
x4
x3
x2
x0
x-1

LOYALTY TOKENS AND SCORING

Loyalty tokens are your primary means of winning the game.

You have a total of five loyalty tokens, one for each empire. You also have five loyalty slots on your player board: Devout (x4), Dutiful (x3), Affiliated (x2), Unallied (x0), and Opposed (x-1).

Your loyalty tokens will score you points at the end of the game by multiplying the number of cities the corresponding empire controls at the end of the game by how loyal you were to that empire.

***Example**: At the end of the game, your loyalty tokens are flipped to reveal their empire side. If your Elephant loyalty token is placed on the Dutiful loyalty slot and the Elephant empire ends the game with 3 cities, your bet on Elephant will earn you 9 points at the end of the game (3 cities x 3 loyalty = 9 points).*

In the below graphic, the score for each of your loyalty tokens would be:

***Lion**: 4 loyalty x 2 cities = 8 points*
***Elephant**: 3 loyalty x 3 cities = 9 points*
***Bear**: 2 loyalty x 1 cities = 2 points*
***Eagle**: 0 loyalty x 4 cities = 0 points*
***Horse**: -1 loyalty x 2 cities = -2 points*

Your total score would be 17 (8 + 9 + 2 + 0 - 2).



GAMEPLAY OVERVIEW

Gameplay consists of turns broken down into four phases:

1. Deploy Agents Phase: In player order, starting with the first player and proceeding clockwise, each player removes (except for the first turn) and then deploys agents to **empire councils**, the positions on the board marked Sheriff, Steward, Marshal, and Chancellor.

2. Empire Turns Phase: Each empire's **council position** takes an action.

3. Cleanup Phase: Add the turn marker to the next space on the turn tracker, then each player discards down to the hand limit of 5 cards.

4. Swap Phase: In player order, each player may swap 2 of their unrevealed loyalty tokens. If you choose to do so, you must reveal both of the swapped loyalty tokens. They remain revealed for the rest of the game.

The flow of these phases can be seen by following the arrows around the perimeter of the board. They flow from the Deploy Agents space on the board, onward to each of the council positions, to the turn tracker, and finally to the Swap and Reveal Loyalties spaces. You may move the turn marker piece around the edge of the board, marking these spaces to track where you currently are in the turn.

Gameplay will repeat itself in this order 4 times, with the 1st player marker being passed clockwise after each time. When the "End Game" space on the turn track is filled, the game ends immediately and scoring commences.

DEPLOY AGENTS PHASE

Each empire council consists of 4 council positions (Sheriff, Steward, Marshal, and Chancellor) on which you can place agents. Starting with the first player and proceeding clockwise, you will remove 1 of your agents currently on the board (if any) and then **take turns placing 1 agent** on any open council position on the board until each player has placed 2 agents. The effects and descriptions of these council positions are detailed in the following Empire Turns Phase section on page 10.

2 Player Games: In a 2 player game, each player places 3 agents instead of 2.



Agents deployed to the Bear empire's Steward and Chancellor positions.

EMPIRE TURNS PHASE

The Empire Turns Phase begins with the Bear empire's turn and proceeds clockwise around the board. During an empire's turn, each council position in that empire's council will take **one available action** determined by the player who controls it, starting with the Sheriff and following the arrows up to the Chancellor. Available actions are described in the Council Positions section on page 11.

The player who controls a council position is determined as follows:

- If a council position contains one of your agents, you control that council position.
- If a council position contains no agents, the player who owns the next agent to its right within this council will control that council position. If there are no Agents to its right, no player will control it and it will choose to do nothing as its action.



***Example**: The Pale Raven has placed an agent in the Chancellor position of this council, and The Endless Serpent has placed an agent on the Sheriff position. On the empire's turn, The Endless Serpent will first get to take an action for the Sheriff. Since both Steward and Marshal are empty and The Pale Raven controls the next agent to the right (Chancellor), The Pale Raven takes the action of all three positions.*

Empire Control

A region is controlled by an empire if it has at least 1 banner there, or if it is one of their **home regions** and contains no enemy banners. A home region is a region whose color matches the empire's color.

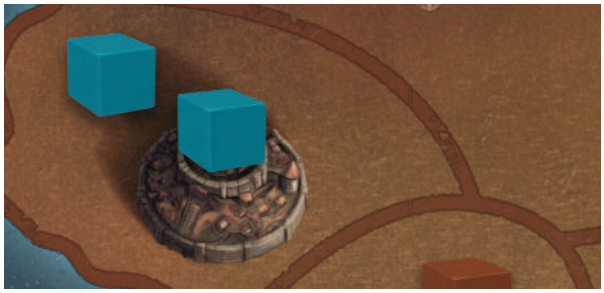


***Example**: Brown regions are the home regions of the Horse empire. Because of this, a brown region with no banners present is controlled by the Horse empire. However, a brown region containing a blue banner would be controlled by the Bear empire.*



Controlling Cities

At the end of the game, the number of cities an empire controls multiplied by a player's loyalty to that empire will grant the player that many points. To control a city, an empire must simply control the region the city is in.



***Example**: The Bear empire controls this region and the city within it.*

Council Positions

Each council position has one or more available actions to choose from.

Add Banner Actions



Add 2 banners to any region(s) controlled by this empire.



For each icon present across all regions controlled by this empire, add 1 banner to any region(s) controlled by this empire.

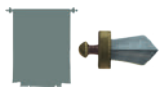


For each icon present across all regions controlled by this empire, add 1 banner to any region(s) controlled by this empire.



For each icon present across all regions controlled by this empire, add 2 banners to any region(s) controlled by this empire.

Attack Action



Attack an enemy army adjacent to a region controlled by the active empire (see Attack Action on page 12 for details). Only one region may be attacked using this action.

Draw Empire Card Actions



Draw 1 card from this empire's deck and add it to your hand.



For every 2 icons present across all regions controlled by this empire, draw 1 card from this empire's deck and add it to your hand.



For every 3 icons present across all regions controlled by this empire, draw 1 card from this empire's deck and add it to your hand.

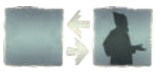


For every 2 icons present across all regions controlled by this empire, draw 1 card from this empire's deck and add it to your hand.



For every 3 icons present across all regions controlled by this empire, draw 1 card from this empire's deck and add it to your hand.

Swap Agent Action



Swap this agent with any other agent within this council, then immediately take its action. *(This does not reset the turn.)*

Checking Supply

A region may only contain 4 banners at the end of an empire's turn. If at the end of the turn there are more than 4 banners, return banners to the supply until there are only 4 left. If a region contains a farm, it has a higher limit of 6 banners.

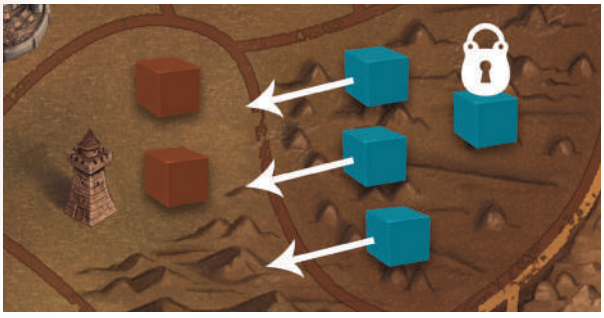


***Example**: Two Horse empire banners must be removed from the region on the left at the end of the Horse empire's turn. The region on the right contains a farm, so the six Bear empire banners were permitted to remain in the region at the end of the Bear empire's turn.*

Attack Action

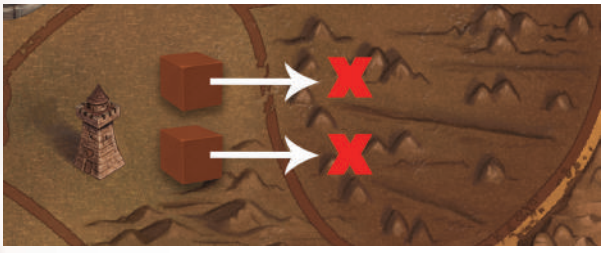
Choose a region controlled by another empire. Move any number of banners from an adjacent region controlled by the active empire into the chosen region. You cannot attack across oceans or seas.

If any banners are being moved from a conquered region (e.g. a region containing the active empire's banners which is not one of its like-colored home regions), you must leave at least 1 banner behind. **You can never completely abandon a conquered enemy region using an attack.**



***Example**: The Bear army making the attack must leave a banner behind to maintain control of the Horse home region.*

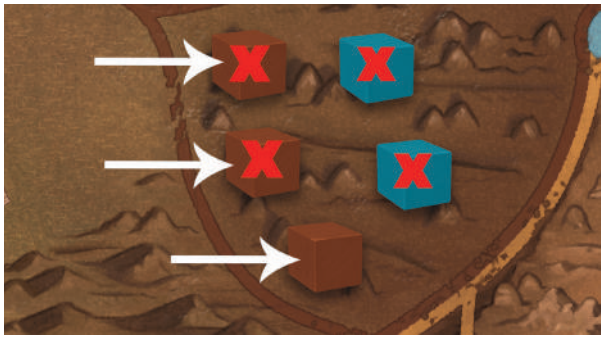
You may never use the Attack action to simply shift banners among an empire's controlled regions, it must be used to attack into an enemy-controlled region.



***Example**: The Horse army cannot use an Attack action to move into another region it controls.*

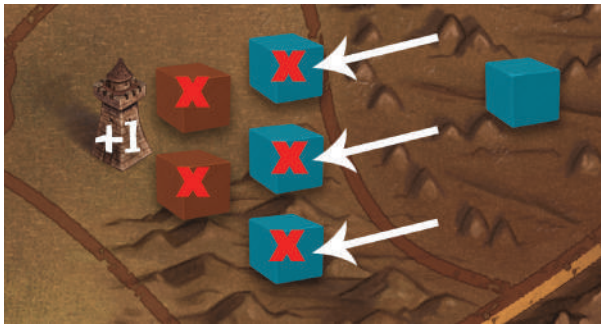
Combat

Combat occurs when banners from one empire move into a region controlled by another empire. Losses are then taken with each side discarding banners at a 1:1 ratio until one (or both) side is depleted. If either side has any banners remaining, they have won the battle.



***Example**: Horse attacks with 3 banners, and Bear defends with 2 banners. Horse wins the battle, and all banners killed are returned to the supply.*

Regions with forts add an extra banner to the defending army for the duration of the combat.



***Example**: Bear attacks with 3 banners, and Horse defends with 2 banners and a fort. The battle is a tie. All banners are killed and returned to the supply. The Horse empire retains control of the contested region as it is one of its home regions.*

MARK THE TURN

Place the current turn marker on the next available space on the turn tracker. The first player marker now passes to the next player clockwise. If the last turn marker is placed, the game ends (without performing the Swap and Cleanup Phases), and you proceed to Final Scoring (see page 15).



SWAP PHASE

Starting with the first player and proceeding clockwise, you each have the opportunity to swap any two of your ***unrevealed*** loyalty tokens. To swap two loyalty tokens, simply switch the loyalty slot in which the two loyalty tokens you chose are currently positioned in and flip them face up so the empire symbols are now visible. These are now revealed and cannot be swapped in subsequent turns.

CLEANUP PHASE

At this point, each player must discard any empire cards in excess of the maximum hand size of 5.

Gameplay returns to the Deploy Agents Phase and a new game round begins.

EMPIRE CARDS

Throughout the game, you will be acquiring empire cards and adding them to your hand. These can be played from your hand to affect the game in a variety of different ways. Each empire's cards will have their own symbol displayed at the top of the card.



***Note**: Card abilities often allow you to break a rule of the game. Therefore if there is a conflict between a general rule and a card ability, follow the instruction on the card.*

5-Card Limit

You may add as many cards to your hand as you like, but during the Cleanup Phase (see page 13), you must discard down to no more than 5 cards in your hand.

Playing Cards

To play a card, decide which card you'll be playing and choose one of the abilities listed on it. Then, pay its cost –you'll do this by discarding cards of the empire and quantities shown in the cost listed beside the chosen ability. The card being played counts as one of the cards being discarded to pay the cost. For this reason, the first ability on each card can be played without discarding any additional cards.

You can play a card immediately before, during, or immediately after using one of your own agents, and the agent doesn't have to match the empire of the card(s) being played. Any time a card is played or discarded, it should be shuffled back into the empire deck it belongs to.



***Example**: To play the above ability from an empire card, you'll need to discard 2 empire cards: this card with its Bear/blue empire ability, and a Lion/yellow empire card. This is not in addition to any other cards, just two cards total will leave your hand.*

FINAL SCORING

The game ends after the Reveal Loyalty Phase of the 4th round. At this point all loyalty tokens are scored (described on page 8) and the player who scores the most points is the winner. If two players are tied for equal points then the player that swapped loyalty the least during the game wins. If both players are still tied, the player with the most empire cards in hand wins.

Player Scores

Loyalty tokens will score you points based on the loyalty level they are bet on and the number of cities the corresponding empire controls.

***Note**: Details on scoring loyalty tokens can be found in the "Loyalty Tokens and Scoring" section on page 8.*

The player with the highest score wins and their secret society rules the world from the shadows.

COMMON TERMS

Add: To take a banner from the supply and add it to a region on the map.

Army: All allied banners in one region.

Banner: A single empire unit, represented by a colored cube.

Home region: A region on the map that, when empty of banners, is controlled by its like-colored home empire.

Kill: Remove a banner from the map and return it to its home banner reserve pile.

ADVANCED RULES

Assigning Agents to Regions

When assigning agents during the Deploy Agents Phase, instead of assigning an agent to a council position you may choose to assign it to any region on the map, even if occupied.

A player's agent in a region counts as a city for that player in final scoring. Players can have a maximum of two agents deployed to the map. Regions can contain more than one agent, but not from the same player.

Agents played to a region can be retrieved at the start of the Deploy Agents phase, just like any other agent. Agents cannot be added or removed from the map in any other way.



***Example**: The Pale Raven has deployed an agent to this brown region. At the end of the game, whatever empire controls this region scores this player points based on their loyalty to it. For instance, if the Bear empire controls this region at game's end and The Pale Raven has a Devout loyalty to the Bear empire, then The Pale Raven player will score 4 points for this agent.*



STARLING
GAMES