

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. One is a wise ruler who 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, unfearful and unloved. They are spiders hidden in high corners, spinning a web in service to no king or lord, but to 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 violent 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 play the part of a secret society that is gambling on this war while pulling strings to rig the results. *A War of Whispers* is a game of deep strategy, hidden agendas, and shifting loyalties.

GOAL

Your primary goal is to ensure that when the game ends, the empires to which you are most loyal control the most cities across the globe.

CREDITS

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STARLING
GAMES

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COMPONENTS



1 Game Board



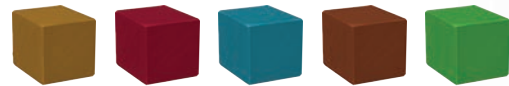
4 Player Boards



20 Loyalty Tokens
(5 Empires per player)



40 Empire Cards
(8 cards per Empire)



100 Banner Cubes
(5 colors, 20 cubes each)



36 Agent Tokens
(9 tokens per society)



4 Round Trackers



1 First Player Token

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” round marker beside the “Start” space on the board (D) and the other three round markers near the round tracker (E).

The Five 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 empire symbols to create the banner reserve piles (F).

The **empire cards** are then split into 5 **empire decks**. Shuffle each deck and place it beside its corresponding empire (G).

The Map

The map on the game board is divided into different colored **empires** which are further divided into regions. If any region on the map contains a small banner image, 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** (H). 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

Each player should shuffle their five loyalty tokens and randomly place them face-down on the five indicated loyalty slots (J) on their player board. You may peek at your own tokens at any time during the game.

MAP SYMBOLS



Farm: Expands the supply limits in a region to 6.



Fort: Kill 1 attacking banner when an attacking army enters this region.



City: Affects final scoring. See page 8, Loyalty Tokens and Scoring.



Banner: Marks starting banner positions.



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 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, you will earn 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

The game is played in rounds; each round has four phases:

1. Deploy Agents Phase: Starting with the first player and proceeding clockwise, each player removes and deploys agents to **empire councils**, the positions on the board marked Sheriff, Steward, Marshal, and Chancellor.

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

3. Cleanup Phase: Add the round marker to the next space on the round 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 is indicated by the arrows around the perimeter of the board. They flow from the Retrieve and Deploy Agents space on the board, onward to each of the council positions, to the round tracker, and finally to the Expose and Swap Loyalties spaces. Move the round marker piece around the edge of the board, tracking each turn within the round, and then marking the round spaces to track where you are in the game.

The game has 4 rounds; pass the 1st player marker clockwise at the end of each round. After the fourth round, the

game ends immediately and scoring commences.

DEPLOY AGENTS PHASE

Each empire council consists of 4 positions (Sheriff, Steward, Marshal, and Chancellor) on which you can place agents.

Step 1 (Retrieve Agents): Except on the first round, starting with the first player and proceeding clockwise, remove 1 of your agents currently on the board (if any).

Step 2 (Deploy Agents): Starting with the first player, take turns placing 1 agent on any open council position on the board until each player has placed 2 agents. The effects of these council positions are detailed in the following section.

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 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. Council positions act in clockwise order as these appear on the game board, starting with the Sheriff and following the arrows up to the Chancellor. Available actions are described in the Council Positions section on the next page.

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

- If a council position has a player's agent deployed on it, that player controls that council position.
- If a council position has no agents, the player who owns the next agent (to the right, clockwise) within this council will control that council position. If there is no agents to its right, no player will control it and it will 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 position that it controls. Since both Steward and Marshal are empty and The Pale Raven controls the next agent to the right (Chancellor), The Pale Raven controls 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

When an empire controls a region, it controls all cities that are there as well. At the end of the game, the number of cities an empire controls is multiplied by a player's loyalty to that empire, granting that player those points towards their final score.



***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, as indicated on the game board. These actions are described here.

Add Banner Actions

If an empire has no more banners to place, you may not select this action. If there are only enough banners left in the supply to partially fulfill this action, you may take this action and simply place the ones that are available.

 x2 Add 2 banners to any region(s) controlled by this empire.

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

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

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

Attack Action

  Attack one enemy region adjacent to a region controlled by the active empire (see Attack Action on page 12).

Draw Empire Card Actions

 x1 Draw 1 card from this empire's deck and add it to your hand.

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

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

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

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

Swap Agent Action

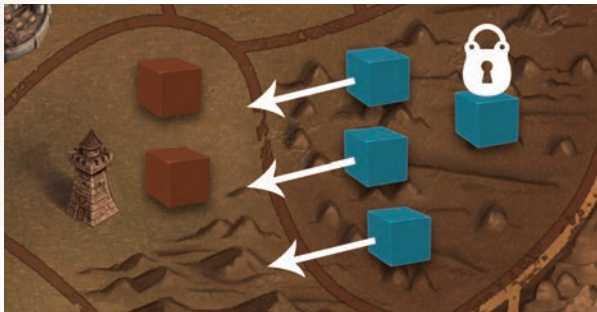
   Swap this agent with any other position within this council, then immediately take that position's action. *(This does not move the round marker. Play continues with the next space clockwise around the board.)*

If the chosen position is occupied by another agent, that agent is moved to the Chancellor position. That agent does not act again this round, but will remain in that position for next round.

Attack Action

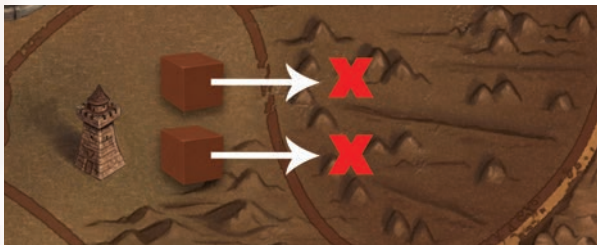
Choose a neighboring region controlled by another empire. Move any number of banners from a single adjacent region controlled by the active empire into the chosen region. You cannot attack across oceans or seas.

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 region.**



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

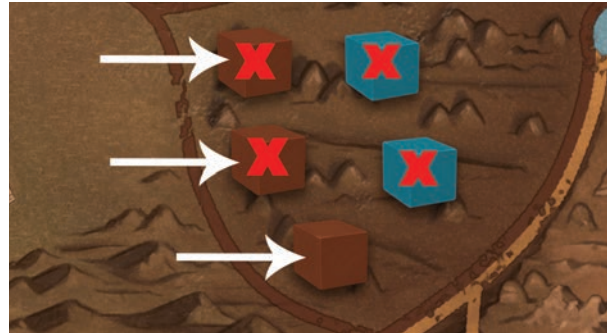
You cannot use the Attack action to simply shift banners among an empire's controlled regions, it must be used to attack an enemy-controlled region.



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

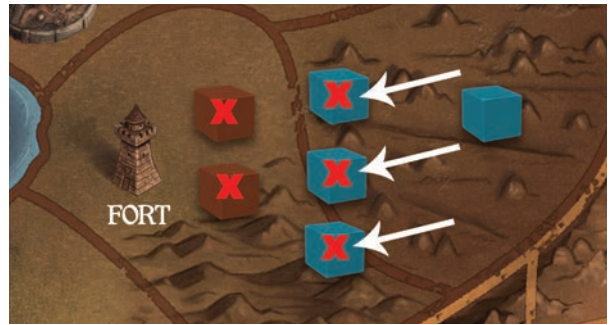
Combat

Combat occurs when banners from one empire move into a region controlled by another empire. Damage is applied to each side by killing (discarding) banners at a 1:1 ratio until one or both sides are 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  destroy 1 attacking banner when an attacking army enters this region.



Example: Bear attacks with 3 banners, and Horse defends with 2 banners and a fort. The fort destroys one of the attacking banners, leaving 2 attacking banners against 2 defending banners. 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.

Checking Supply

At the end of an empire's turn, a region may only contain 4 banners. If there are more than 4 banners, return excess banners to the supply. 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.

MARK THE ROUND

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



CLEANUP PHASE

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

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.

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.

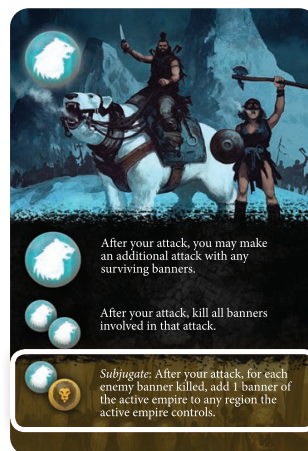
5-Card Limit

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

You can play a card immediately before, during, or immediately after any action taken for a council position you control. The council position or region being affected does not have to match the empire of the card(s) being played. Resolve one card's effects before playing and resolving the next card. Any time a card is played or discarded, it should be shuffled back into the empire deck it belongs to.

To play a card, choose an ability on that card. Each ability has a cost. The symbols next to the ability indicate empire cards that must be discarded to pay for that ability. The card you are playing counts as a “discard” for this payment. For this reason, the first ability on each card can be played without discarding additional cards.



Example: To play the highlighted ability for this empire card, you'll first 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; two cards total will leave your hand.

FINAL SCORING

The game ends after the fourth round marker is placed at the end of the fourth round. Reveal all loyalty tokens and score them as described on page 8. The player who scores the most points is the winner. If two or more players are tied for highest score then the player that swapped loyalty the least wins. If any players are still tied, the player with the most empire cards in hand wins.

COMMON TERMS

Army: Any number of allied banners in one region.

Active Agent: While a council position is **active** and under your control, the agent token that gives you that control is the Active Agent. An agent remains active until it has no more abilities to use for its council position(s). This is important for the timing of certain cards.

Active Council Position: When it is a council position's turn to act, it is only considered active until it has taken an action. This is important for the timing of certain cards.

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

Empty: Describes a region that contains no banners.

Friendly: Describes banners belonging to the empire that controls the region. For example, when instructed to add friendly banners to a yellow region controlled by blue, you add blue banners.

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 may 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.*

CARD CLARIFICATIONS

 : All attacking and defending banners in the combat are killed. A single banner can be sacrificed as an attack to kill a whole defending army this way, even if the defending space has a fort.

  *Disperse*: If there are no adjacent regions controlled by that empire, return the banners to the supply.

 : This must be done before taking an action, you are exchanging one possible action for another. If the second position is in a different empire, take that action on behalf of the second empire. Play then continues clockwise from the first (abandoned) position, advancing the round marker as normal. If there are no empty council positions, this ability cannot be used.

  *Reinforce*: The banners are moved from any one region the active empire controls into the region being attacked, then combat resolves. This cannot be used to abandon a conquered region. Supply limits are calculated afterwards as normal.

 : This must be done before taking an action, you are exchanging one possible action for another. If the second position is in a different empire, take that action on behalf of the second empire. Neither position needs to be occupied by an agent, as long as you control both positions. Play then continues clockwise from the first position whose action was forfeited, advancing the round marker as normal.

 : You may move any number of banners from one qualifying region to another. However, you may not abandon a conquered region.