

# Tara, Seat of Kings

A strategy board game for 2 to 4 players from 10 years old upwards

## Rules of Play

In **Tara, Seat of Kings** each player strives to be crowned **Ard Ri** or High King at Tara, the ancient site of the throne of Ireland. Through the play of cards representing a player's supporters and the use of 'cumals' (a cumal is worth three cows), players attempt to promote their followers from Farmers to Herdsmen, through Warriors to Chieftains and finally to the ruling King in the region. But beware of the traitor!

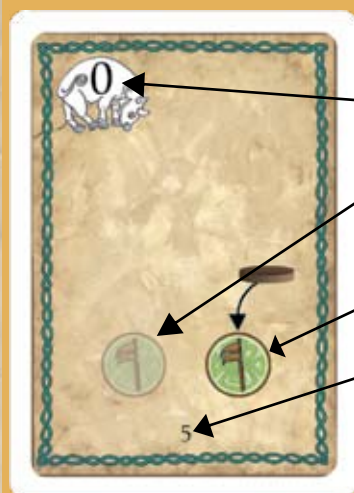
A player who has a King in two of the regions is crowned High King of Ireland at Tara and wins the game.

## Game Components

- 1 Tara board
- 36 card Tara deck
- 4 Rath cards
- 8 Reference cards (4 in English, 4 in German)
- 4 x sets of playing pieces (20 per set in blue, red, white and yellow, plus 2 King pieces in each colour)
- Cumals (36 x 1 cumal, 7x 5 cumals)
- Starting Player Cube (black cube)

The ancient Irish word for fort was Rath.

### A sample card



**Activation Cost** in cumals (0 to 4)

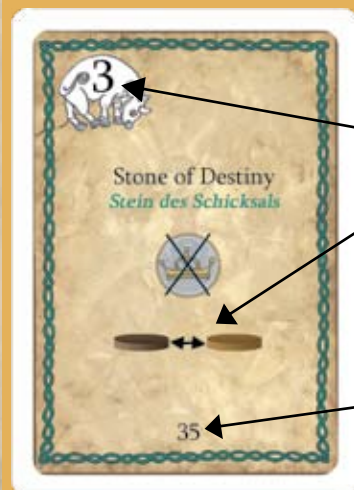
These positions (occupied or not) must be present in relation to the Placement Position.

**Placement Position**

**Tie-break Number** (1 to 36)

The cards show how many pieces players can place, where they can be placed and how much it costs to activate the pieces for promotion. In addition each card has a Tie-break Number to settle ties during the game.

### A sample Stone of Destiny card



**Activation Cost**

Swap **any** two pieces in one region not in the King position; a player may then pay to activate one or both of his or her pieces that moved.

**Tie-break Number** (1 to 36)



### A sample Rath card

Place the player's cumals here.

Place the player's prisoners here.

## Summary of Play

**T**ara, *Seat of Kings* is played in rounds of three cards. A round is completed when all players have used three cards.

At the beginning of alternate rounds the Starting Player deals each player six cards. Each player chooses three of these cards to use in round one and puts aside the remaining three cards (under the Rath card is convenient) - the other set of three cards will be used in the next round. During each round players will play all three of the cards they have chosen.

In a player turn, the player selects and plays one card from hand. Then the next player to the left takes a turn, and so on, until each player has played all three of their cards in hand.

In a turn, the player chooses one of four actions:

- A. Play a card and place pieces into a region;
- B. Play a Stone of Destiny card to swap two pieces in a region;
- C. Discard any card and pay 4 cumals to declare an Amnesty in a region, releasing all captives;
- D. Discard any card to gain 2 cumals.

If the player placed or swapped pieces, the player may pay the card's Activation Cost to promote from two of his or her adjacent pieces to the position immediately above them (see example 5 on page 8). For example, if a player placed a herdsman next to another of his or her herdsmen, the player could pay the Activation Cost and put a piece above both herdsmen into the position at the warrior level. The object is to gain a King in the region by promoting to the King position.

By placing or promoting pieces the player might capture opposing pieces and release his or her own that have been previously captured.

After all players have played the three cards in hand, carry out the End of Round sequence. Each region may have a traitor (see Traitor Sequence on page 8). The player who owns the traitor swaps one of their pieces for an opponent's piece and may then pay to promote from the traitor's position. Players then collect income, dependent on the number of pieces they have

## Sequence of Play

### Start of Round

1. If players have no cards, shuffle and deal 6 to each player.
2. Either:
  - a. Choose 3 cards to play this round and set aside 3 to play next round; or
  - b. Use the 3 cards set aside last round.

### Player Turns

3. Choose a region to play in.
4. Play one card and carry out all associated actions.
5. Put the card played in the discard pile.
6. Next player's turn or end of round.

### End of Round

7. Play traitors.
8. Collect income.
9. Clear region(s) (if King).
10. Carry out exchange and ransom.
11. Choose new Starting Player.

## Actions

One from A, B, C or D:

- A. Play a card and place pieces into one or more of the Placement Positions shown on the card. May promote.
- B. Play a Stone of Destiny card to swap any two pieces in one region that are not in a King position. May promote.
- C. Discard any card and pay 4 cumals to declare an Amnesty in a region, releasing all captives.
- D. Discard any card and gain 2 cumals.

on the board and their rank. Then remove pieces from any region containing a new King; the player with the new King may establish a garrison in the region, captives are placed on the Rath cards and exchange or ransom of prisoners may occur. Finally the Starting Player chooses a new Starting Player for the next round. A new round then begins, using the three cards set aside by each player if they remain, or by dealing another six cards to each player and splitting them into two sets of three.

The game continues until one player controls the King's position in two different regions. That player is declared the winner.

## Set up

**P**lace the Tara board, so that all players can reach it easily. For four players, use all four regions of the board. For three players, use any three regions.

Give each player a reference card, 2 cumals, a Rath card and the matching set of coloured playing pieces.

Decide on the Starting Player for the first round: Each player turns over a card. The player with the highest Tie-break Number is the Starting Player and takes the Starting Player Cube.

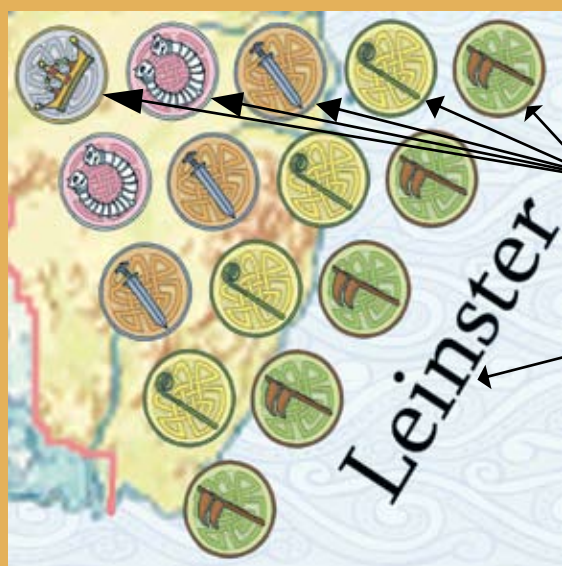
The Starting Player shuffles the whole deck and deals six new cards face down to each player. Put the rest of the deck face down on the Tara board.

Each player secretly chooses three of the six cards to form a hand of cards for the first round and stores the other three underneath the Rath card. One round finishes after each player has played three cards.

The Starting Player takes the first turn.

### Tara for Two

Start with any two regions and play as normal. Once one region has been won, the King player marks it with a King piece, and this region cannot be played on again. A player who wins both the two starting regions wins the game. If the scores are tied at one King each, then leave the King pieces in each relevant King position, and select a third region. The winner of the third region wins the game.



A Sample Region

Five different ranks

Region Name

Key



## Start of Round

**A**t the start of the game and after every alternate round, the Starting Player shuffles the whole deck (including the discard pile) and deals each player six new cards face down. Each player then selects three of these six cards to play in the new round, storing the remainder under their Rath card to play in the following round.

## Player Turn

**I**n a player's turn, the player chooses a region to play in and selects **ONE** of the following actions:

- A. Play a card from hand and **place pieces** into one or more of the Placement Positions shown on the card (see sample card on page 1). The player can place a piece into one or two positions, dependent on the card. Then the player may pay the Activation Cost shown on the card to activate the pieces in the selected Placement Positions and promote from eligible pieces.
- B. Play a **Stone of Destiny** card to swap **any** two pieces in one region that are not in a King position; the player may then pay 3 cumals to activate one or both of his or her pieces that moved and promote from eligible pieces.
- C. Declare an **Amnesty**. Choose a region, discard any card from hand and pay 4 cumals to stock. All captives in the region are released. Return the pieces to their owners' stock.
- D. **Discard** any card from hand and gain 2 cumals.

When a player has finished the turn, put the card in the discard pile.

Play passes to the next player to the left, until all players have played three cards in the round.

### Special cases:

1. If the player chooses to place pieces into a completely unoccupied region (i.e. no pieces of any kind in it), then the player must pay 2 cumals to stock; this rule does not apply to the first player in the first round of the game.
2. If at any time a player's pieces occupy all the positions in one region, clear that region as if it is the end of a round and then continue the round. Do not play traitors, collect income, carry out exchange and ransom or choose a new Starting Player.

Players should consider how many cumals they have when making their choices. If players haven't got enough cumals to pay for Activation Costs, they won't be able to promote their pieces.

Either:

Place pieces, or

Play a Stone of Destiny, or

Declare an Amnesty, or

Discard for 2 cumals.

All pieces below the top piece in a stack are captives (see page 6).

It costs nothing to place pieces. The Activation Cost is only payable when a player wants to promote.

Choosing a region comes before placing pieces, so a player is not forced to play in a particular region just because positions are empty.

Pay 2 cumals to start a new region.

To occupy a whole region will take most of a player's pieces, as there are 15 positions in a region.

## Placing Pieces

Most cards depict an array of positions, some greyed out and some not. Pieces can only be placed into positions that are not greyed out, where indicated by a playing piece and an arrow. These are called 'Placement Positions'. Players can only place into the positions with the indicated rank. The greyed out positions show which other positions in the region must exist (occupied or not), thereby restricting the positions that can be chosen.

### Example 1: Farmer card



The player must select Placement Positions in a chosen region in accordance with the card and with the following priorities:

1. The player must choose Placement Positions in the chosen region that are empty, if possible; if it is not possible to choose completely empty Placement Positions, then
2. The player must choose those with most Placement Positions empty; if there are none, then
3. The player may choose any Placement Positions indicated on the card.

The player may choose between Placement Positions, as long as he or she obeys the above restrictions and follows the array shown on the card.

### Example 2: Placement



The number of playing pieces (20) is a limit. If a player does not have pieces available in stock, then the player cannot place more pieces.

Placing pieces is always voluntary. If the card shows two Placement Positions, a player can place a piece into either or both positions.

### Example 3: Single Herdsman card



### Example 1 Farmer card

With this card a player could place a piece in any Farmer position except the leftmost one, because there must be another Farmer position to the left of the Placement Position.

### Example 2 Placement

In this example, if a player played the card in Example 1 for placement of pieces, he or she would have to put a piece into the rightmost Farmer position. The player could not place into the leftmost position, because there must be at least one Farmer position to the left of the Placement Position, and the player could not place into any of the three middle positions, because he or she must place into a vacant position if possible.

### Example 3 Single herdsman card

With this card, a player may place a single piece into any empty Herdsman position, or, if all Herdsman positions are occupied, into any Herdsman position.

#### Example 4: Two Placement Positions on a card



If a player places a piece on top of an opponent's piece, then the opponent's piece is captured (see Capturing Pieces). If a player places a piece on top of his or her own piece, a fort is created (see Creating a Fort).

#### Capturing Pieces

If a player cannot place a piece into a vacant position, the player may choose to place a piece on top of an opponent's piece. This captures all opposing pieces in the position, and any pieces owned by the placing player in the position are immediately released; return them to the player's stock. Successive turns may result in other pieces capturing the same position, building up a stack of pieces.

The top piece shows which player controls the position. All pieces below the top piece in a stack are known as 'Captives'; this includes any fortifying piece (see Creating a Fort).

#### Creating a Fort

If a player cannot place a piece into a vacant position, the player may choose to place a piece into a position he or she already controls on top of one of his or her own pieces. A maximum of two of pieces of the same colour may be at the top of a stack. This creates a fort in that position.

Exception: a fort cannot be created in the King's position.

If a player attempts to place a piece into an opposing fortified position either through the placing pieces action or by promotion, then the top piece of the fortified stack is removed and returned to the owning player, but no new piece is placed; the fort has been destroyed but the owning player still controls the position. Fortification does not prevent a traitor or Stone of Destiny swap action.

The piece below the top piece in a fortified position is considered a captive, even though the player controlling the position owns it.

Each player may create only one fort per region.

If a player wishes to create a new fort in a region in which the player already has one, the player may play a card in the normal way to add a piece to the top of the stack in a position he or she already controls, then remove to stock the top piece of the old fort in the region.

#### Example 4: Two Placement Positions on a card

With this card, a player may place two pieces, one into a Herdsman position and one into a Farmer position. The Herdsman piece must be above and immediately to the right of the Farmer piece placed. The player cannot place the Farmer in the rightmost Farmer position.

Captives will only be removed to Rath cards in the Clear Region step at the end of the round and then only if a piece has been promoted to the King rank.

A player may create his or her own fort in a region containing forts owned by other players.

## Promoting Pieces

### Activation

Once the player has paid the Activation Cost printed on the card, his or her piece is activated if:

1. The piece was placed this turn into a position adjacent to one of the player's pieces of the same rank, or
2. The piece was promoted this turn into a position adjacent to one of the player's pieces of the same rank, or
3. The position into which the player could have placed or promoted a piece was already controlled by that player, or
4. A piece was moved to the top of a stack with the Stone of Destiny or placed with the traitor.

### Promotion

Two adjacent pieces at one rank, at least one of which must be activated (see above), can promote into the position immediately above them. Place a new piece from stock into that position (see Example 5 on page 8).

If the player chooses to promote, first the player must pay the cost in cumals printed on the card. Then ...

If the position above the two adjacent pieces is empty ...

=> the player places one of his or her pieces from stock in it.

If the position is controlled by an opponent ...

=> the player places one of his or her pieces from stock on top of the stack and releases any of his or her pieces in the stack (return them to stock).

If the player controls the position already ...

=> the player may choose to add another piece from stock to create a fort in the position.

The promoted piece, fortifying piece or any existing owned piece at the top of the stack in the position above the two adjacent pieces is then also activated.

The player can continue to promote with no further cost, if the newly activated piece is adjacent to one of his or her pieces at the higher rank (see Example 5).

Placement of pieces by promotion is always voluntary.

### Amnesty

As a player's action for the turn, the player may declare an Amnesty. Choose any one region, select and discard a card from hand and pay 4 cumals to stock. All captives in the chosen region are released, and the pieces are returned to their owners' stock. This includes forts, which are thereby reduced to one piece. After the Amnesty all positions in the affected region should be empty or have only one piece remaining. King pieces are unaffected.

Promote pieces by paying the Activation Cost, then placing a new piece in the position a rank above the two adjacent pieces.

Placing pieces is always voluntary.

A position is controlled by the topmost piece on a stack.

Players may continue to promote for no further cost as long as they have an activated piece adjacent to another of their pieces at the same rank.

### Example 5: Promotion



## End of Round

When all players have used all three cards, the round ends, and players carry out the End of Round sequence.

### Traitor Sequence

There may be a traitor in each region. Carry out the traitor sequence starting with Connacht and moving clockwise round the board.

Using the traitor costs 1 cumal. All players with at least one piece in the region, except the current dominant player in the region, may be eligible to own the traitor. A player who is the dominant player of a region cannot own the traitor for that region.

**Dominant player:** If a player controls the King's position (either with a King piece or an ordinary piece), that player is automatically the dominant player. Otherwise the player with the most controlled positions is the dominant player. In the event of a tie for most controlled positions, no player is the dominant player.

The player with the most controlled positions in the region, excluding the dominant player, chooses whether or not to pay 1 cumal for the traitor. In the event of a tie for most controlled positions, each tied player turns up the topmost card from the deck, and the highest Tie-break Number has first option to own the traitor. If this player decides not to pay for the traitor, the next player clockwise round the table (always excluding the dominant player) has the option, and so on until either someone has paid for the traitor, or all players have passed. If all players pass, there is no traitor for this round in that region.

The player who owns the traitor takes the top card from the deck. That player may exchange one of his or her pieces from stock for one piece of an opponent that is at the top of one of the Placement Positions indicated on the card in the region (choose only one if more than one Placement Position is on the card). The player may then pay the cost indicated on the card and activate the piece, promoting from this position if eligible. If the player has no pieces in stock, the player can still own the traitor, but cannot carry out the associated action.

**Special case:** If the card is a Stone of Destiny, the player may choose any non-King position controlled by an opponent to carry out the traitor exchange as described above.

### Example 5: Promotion

In this example, Blue could play the card from Example 1, so that she places a blue piece into position 1, capturing the white piece. Paying the cost of the card is simple (it is 0, so there is no cost). Promotion is into position 2, which is immediately above the two adjacent blue pieces. If she had a piece in position 3, then a further promotion could happen into the Warrior rank at no extra cost. If there was also a blue piece in position 4, then promotion could continue into the Chieftain rank too.

If the rightmost Farmer position had been empty, this set of promotions would not have been possible, because Blue would have had to play the initial Farmer piece into that position.

### End of Round

- Play traitors.
- Collect income.
- Clear boards (if King).
- Carry out exchange and ransom.
- Choose new Starting Player.

Players should be careful to consider who might win the traitors and how much income they might get, before playing out all their cards.

There can never be more than one traitor per region.

'Exchange pieces' means a player removes an opponent's piece (return to stock, not capture) and places one of his or her own. If there is a stack, the traitor captures other players' pieces and releases friendly ones.

A fort is not immune from the traitor!



**Income**

Income is generated once each round.

Taking each region in turn, add up the number of controlled positions that each player has in each separate rank (Farmers, Herdsmen, Warriors and Chieftains, but not the King). Pay 1 cumal from stock to the player with most pieces at that rank in that region. If two or more players have an equal number of pieces at that rank, then no income is paid for that rank in that region.

Each player also receives 1 cumal for each rank, in which he or she has controlling pieces in more than one region.

**Example 6:**

**Income**

John (blue) has 2 Farmers, 2 Herdsmen, 2 Warriors and 1 Chieftain in Leinster, and 1 Herdsman in Ulster. Christine (yellow) has 3 Farmers, 1 Herdsman and 1 Warrior in Leinster, and 2 Farmers, 1 Herdsman and 1 Warrior in Ulster. Starting in Leinster, totalling the ranks, Christine wins the Farmer rank by 3 to 2, and receives the 1 cumal income; John wins the Herdsman rank by 2 to 1, the Warrior rank by 2 to 1, and the Chieftains by 1 to nil, so receives 3 cumul. In Ulster, Christine wins the Farmers by 2 to nil and the Warriors by 1 to nil, giving her 2 cumul; Herdsmen are drawn 1 all, so no-one gets income for the Herdsmen rank. Neither player has a King, for which income is not received anyway. John receives 1 bonus for having a Herdsman in more than one region; Christine receives 3 bonuses for having Farmers, Herdsmen and Warriors in more than one region. Total income given out is therefore: John receives 4 cumul, while Christine receives 6 cumul.

**Example 6: Income**



**Clear regions**

Clear each region that has a new King this round. If there are no new Kings, skip this step.

To clear a region players take all the pieces on the positions that they control in the region, releasing their own pieces to stock, and placing any other players' pieces as prisoners on their Rath cards.

**The King piece**

After clearing a region the player with the new King places a King piece of his or her colour on the King's position in the region. The player controlling the King may optionally garrison the region with an additional two pieces placed singly into any other positions in the region.

A King piece is not affected by the traitor or the Stone of Destiny card. If an opposing player plays an appropriate card and wishes to promote into the King's position, the promoting player pays the cost on the card, the King piece is immediately removed to the stock of the owning player, but no new piece is promoted into the position. The owning player loses the kingship, and a further normal promotion into the King's position is needed to create a King again.

A King piece may only be removed as indicated above.

Placing a King piece is not optional. An additional garrison of up to two more pieces is optional.

A player with a King may play pieces into a region he has garrisoned, typically when the region is under attack.

## Exchange/Ransom

Starting with the Starting Player and moving clockwise once round each player, each player must exchange and / or ransom prisoners.

Players must exchange and offer for ransom as many of the prisoners held on their Rath card as possible. The player must first exchange prisoners on a one for one basis with any player who holds his or her pieces prisoner, then offer for ransom any other of that player's pieces held prisoner.

Players cannot refuse to exchange pieces, but may choose not to pay ransoms. All exchanges must be 1 piece for 1 piece. Ransoms must be paid at rates of 1 cumal for one prisoner, 2 cumals for two prisoners or 3 cumals for all prisoners of their colour held on one Rath card. The owner of the pieces pays the ransom to the player who captured them.

Players can only exchange and pay ransoms for their own pieces; other types of prisoner exchange and ransom are not permitted.

Exchange is mandatory.  
Payment of ransoms is optional.

1 cumal = 1 prisoner  
2 cumals = 2 prisoners  
3 cumals = all prisoners

### Example 7: Exchange and Ransom



### Example 7: Exchange and Ransom

**Blue:** exchanges 2 white prisoners for White's 2 blue prisoners. Blue now offers White and Red the chance to ransom back their 1 remaining prisoner. White and Red must decide now, whether to spend 1 cumal for the ransom. White decides it is more cost effective to ransom the ones from Yellow. Red decides to leave her prisoner to languish for a while longer.

**Yellow:** exchanges 2 white prisoners for 2 yellow ones, then offers White his remaining 4 prisoners for ransom. White pays 3 cumals to Yellow for the return of all 4.

**White:** has no remaining prisoners, so does nothing.

**Red:** has no prisoners, so does nothing.

## Choose new Starting Player

If no player has won the game, continue with the next round. The Starting Player chooses any other player as the Starting Player for the next round and gives the Starting Player Cube to that player.

## Victory

If a player controls the King's position in two different regions at the same time, replace the pieces there with his or her King pieces immediately. That player is promoted to High King and wins the game.

## Player Notes

**T**ara, *Seat of Kings* involves strategy, tactics, the application of limited resources and some luck.

For strategic purposes it is useful to have an overall plan for your game, so that you can determine, for instance, which region will be the initial target of your main effort, or how many pieces you will devote to the generation of income. Take into account how your opponents are deploying their pieces when deciding on your own strategy. Bear in mind that, to win the game, you must prevent your opponents from depriving you of any kingship you have won, while you yourself win a second one.

The cards provide you with the tactical opportunities to realise your strategy. It can be tempting to try to execute a fixed plan for all three moves in a round in advance, forgetting that the other players might well be able to mess up your plan. Your tactics should take account of the development of the situation in your target region. Cards with mostly Farmer Placement Positions allow you to build from the bottom, potentially undermining your rivals, whereas the cards with more expensive activation costs might help you to promote to the King position more quickly. Remember that placing pieces doesn't cost you any cumals, and careful placement can disrupt your opponents' plans even if you cannot promote.

The order of play during the round can also be important. Playing early in the round may help you to get to the top before others have much chance to stop you, but playing late might enable you to set up your pieces for more income or for a good position in the following round. Playing late may also mean you can capture the pieces of those that played early. Bear in mind your playing position in this round and likely position in the next round.

Cumals are an essential resource. The cards only allow you to put pieces directly into the Farmer, Herdsman and Warrior ranks, so you will need to promote your pieces to occupy the Chieftain and King positions. Though you can promote cheaply from the Farmer rank, it is almost certain that you will need a significant number of cumals to pay for

activation at some point. Plan to deploy some of your pieces for the purposes of income generation, by having the most pieces in a rank, having pieces at the same rank in more than one region, or indirectly by capturing prisoners. The traitors come before the income stage, so you might find that skilful treachery pays off too, particularly if you are the last player in the round. Alternatively a judicious discard of an un-inspiring card can help to raise cash.

Beware of over-committing your pieces. If you deploy too many pieces into more than one region or suffer excessive losses from captures, then you may find that you cannot promote to the King rank owing to lack of pieces, rather than lack of cumals or cards.

Remember that the game ends when any player gets a second King. It can be important not to allow a player with one King free 'reign' in an empty region!

Finally, don't despair! If things look black, you can still hope that a traitor will reverse your fortunes!

## Credits

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