THE SEA MERCHANTS

Instructions

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Ah! Long live the 16th century! What a wonderful time to be a merchant in a bustling port city! Lead one of the four merchant families, feel the wind in your sails, and set your course for victory.

Observe your competitors' operations and anticipate the demand for particular products. Load your ships with the most desired goods and earn profits when the demand is highest.

Wood, spices, or maybe porcelain? What will earn the most in foreign lands? What will bring you the best price, and what will you lose because of other players' actions? Speculate in products and develop your fleet to become as rich as possible and sail ahead of the competition.

Contents

◆ 60 product cards (10 each of grain, wood, porcelain, fish, spices, cloth)

◆ 20 special cards (14 ship cards, 2 contract cards, 2 dock cards, 2 office cards)

◆ 4 player aid cards

◆ 30 product cubes (5 of each color representing products: yellow grain, brown wood, white porcelain, blue fish, red spices, green cloth)

◆ 55 coins (gold worth 10, silver worth 5, copper worth 1; players can always make change as needed)

= 10   = 5   = 1

Game preparation

Shuffle the 60 product cards, then deal 6 cards face up in the center of the table, creating a **market** - this represents the current demand for products. Place the remaining product cards in a face-down deck near the market. Place the coins, product cubes, and face-up special cards (divided into four decks by category) in an easily accessible pool. Each player draws 3 product cards from the top of the deck into their hand, hiding their cards from other players. Each player takes 2 ship cards from the pool and keeps them face up on the table. You're almost ready to leave port!

Loading

The player who was most recently on a boat is the first player. In clockwise order, starting with the first player, each player chooses and takes 1 product cube from the pool and puts it on one of their ships. Then repeat that, so each player has 2 loaded ships, each with 1 product. A player may take 2 of the same product or 2 different products.

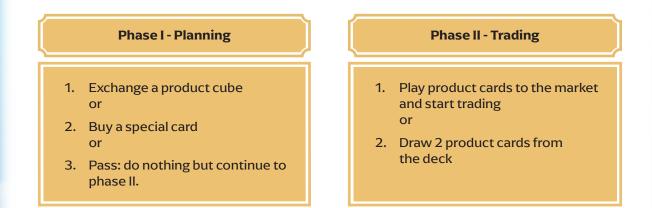> Note: Each ship can hold only 1 product cube.

Sequence of play

Each player's turn has **2 phases**. During each phase, the player can do **only 1** of the phase's possible actions. The first player does their turn first, then players take turns in clockwise order.

Phase I - Planning

1. Exchange a product cube
    or
2. Buy a special card
    or
3. Pass: do nothing but continue to phase II.

Phase II - Trading

1. Play product cards to the market and start trading
    or
2. Draw 2 product cards from the deck

Details of phase I actions

Phase I

◈ **Exchange a product cube:** The player exchanges the product cube on one of their ships with a product cube in the pool. This action exchanges only **once** (from one ship), unless the player has a dock card (see page 7).

◈ **Buy a special card:** The player buys a special card from the pool and keeps it face up. Each card shows its price. A player can have more than 1 special card of a given type; their effects are cumulative. The effects of special cards are described on page 7.

Example: A player with 2 contract cards receives 4 (2 × 2) additional copper coins each time they earn money during trading.

Phase II

◇ **Play product cards to the market and start trading:** The player plays one or more product cards of one type from their hand to the market (each played card covers a card already there), thus increasing demand for that type of product. **All** players who have **that type of product cube** in their ships earn money. **The more cards of that type of product there are in the market, the greater the income**: for each ship with that type of product, the ship's owner earns **as many copper coins** as the **number of that product's cards in the market**.

> Note: the product cubes stay in the ships.

Example: The market has 1 fish card, and a player plays 2 more fish cards, causing the market to have 3 fish cards. Then each player earns 3 copper coins for each of their ships with a fish cube.

$2 \times 3 = 6$

$1 \times 3 = 3$

◇ **Draw 2 product cards from the deck:** The player simply draws the top 2 cards from the product deck to their hand. There is no hand size limit.

Special cards

Ship card: Cost = 10. A ship increases the size of its owner's fleet, creating more opportunities for trade. Immediately after buying a ship, the player also takes 1 product cube from the pool and puts it onto the new ship.

Contract card: Cost = 11. Each contract gives its owner **2 additional copper** coins whenever the owner has 1 or more of the type of product being traded and thus earns money during trading.

Office card: Cost = 8. Each office card lets its owner **optionally** draw 1 product card from the deck at the end of phase II, regardless of what action they did in phase II.

Dock card: Cost = 12. Each dock card lets its owner exchange 1 product cube on 1 ship in phase I, regardless of which phase I action is done. So if a player with 1 dock card does the "Exchange a product cube" action, they can exchange 2 product cubes, and if they do the "Buy a special card" action, they also exchange 1 product cube. A player can use a dock card to exchange 1 product cube even in the same action that they buy the dock card!

Example: A player already has a dock card. During phase I, they decide to buy a ship card. They take a new ship card and place a product cube on it as usual. In addition, they can also exchange 1 product cube on 1 of their ships, thanks to their dock card.

Game end

The game ends immediately when the last card is drawn from the product deck. The winner is the player with the most money, thanks to their merchant skills.

In case of a tie for the most money, the tied players share the title of the greatest merchant family. (Players' product cubes, product cards, and special cards do not count toward victory.)

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