

01 / What is in the box

DESIGN PROTOTYPE v0.1 / 13 OCTOBER 2026

Set structure

4 commanders: two per faction. 24 army designs: twelve per faction, including a command camp. 12 stratagem designs: six per faction. Each army uses 15 battlefield cards plus twelve stratagem cards. Both commanders are supplied, but choose only one per match. Thus each faction has 29 supplied cards, of which 28 are used in a match.

Card types and resources

Army cards occupy one space each. Rank is combat strength, not historical seniority. Commanders stay face up off-board. Stratagems are held in hand and discarded after use. There is no mana, health tracking, resource deck or random combat roll. Crossbows fight adjacent enemies; they do not shoot across the board.

Deck construction for v0.1

Use the fixed starter lists in this book. Do not add cards or change quantities for the first tests. The chosen commander must match the army faction. Card rarity and premium finishes will not alter rules or strength. Open deck construction can follow after these lists are tested.

What else you need

A 5-column by 9-row battlefield, opaque identical sleeves for all battlefield cards, a round counter, and two commander-use markers. Keep twelve stratagems in a separate deck. A player may inspect their own concealed cards at any time. Record revealed information openly if desired.

Victory and time limit

Win immediately when your unit attacks the enemy Command Camp. At the end of round 30, if neither camp has fallen, the game is a draw. A round is one turn by each player. A player with no useful action may pass; two consecutive passes end the game in a draw.

02 / Setup and turn sequence

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Secret deployment

Columns A-E run left to right from the Qin edge; rows 1-9 run from Qin to Zhao. Qin deploys in rows 1-3; Zhao in rows 7-9. Put each Command Camp face down at C1 or C9 respectively; its location is public. Arrange the other fourteen army cards secretly in the remaining fourteen deployment spaces. All army cards begin concealed.

Prepare to play

Select one commander per side and place it face up beside the board, ability unused. Shuffle each twelve-card stratagem deck and draw three. Randomly choose the first player. The first player skips the draw on their first turn. Both players may review the fixed opposing deck list before deployment.

Start of your turn

Draw one stratagem if your deck is not empty. If you occupy either Supply space with a mobile unit, you may then discard one stratagem and draw one, once total per turn. Empty decks are not reshuffled; a draw from an empty deck does nothing. Hands remain private.

Take exactly one action

Choose: move or attack with one unit; use a Scout action; play one stratagem; use Wang Jian's commander action; or pass. Stratagem effects replace your normal action. A stratagem cannot be played unless its first required instruction is legal. Later optional instructions may be skipped.

End of turn

Discard down to five cards in hand. Temporary combat bonuses expire after their stated combat. Completed stratagems go face up to the discard pile. Alternate turns and advance the round counter after the second player's turn. No automatic healing, spawning or retreat occurs.

03 / Movement and combat

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Movement

Adjacent means one orthogonal space: never diagonal. A normal move goes one space to an empty walkable space. A normal attack is declared against an adjacent enemy and uses that unit's action. Never move through occupied spaces, impassable river or off the board. A Command Camp can never move, attack, be concealed by an effect, or be chosen for a movement effect.

Multi-step moves and distance

Resolve each step in order. A two-space move may turn; neither step can enter an occupied space. Cavalry's printed two-space move requires both destination spaces to be empty Plain terrain. Card effects granting two steps override that Plain restriction but not occupancy or impassable terrain. Distance for scouting is the shortest orthogonal path through walkable spaces, ignoring occupants.

Declaration window

Name the attacker and target before flipping cards. Li Mu may respond first; a successful retreat cancels combat and spends the attack, leaving the attacker in place. If not cancelled, the attacking commander may respond, then the defending commander. Each commander is usable once per battle, tracked with a marker. You cannot spend an ability after seeing the concealed ranks.

Resolve combat

Reveal both cards. If the defender is the Command Camp, its owner loses immediately. Otherwise calculate effective Rank: printed Rank plus applicable printed abilities, terrain, commander and stratagem modifiers. Higher Rank survives; the loser is removed face up to casualties. On a tie, remove both. If only the attacker survives, it occupies the defender's space; otherwise it stays in its original space if alive.

Hidden information and modifiers

Cards stay face up after being revealed until an effect conceals them. To use a Scout action, Cavalry move, or Standard Bearer aura, reveal that unit first; revealing a Standard Bearer on your turn is free before your action. A concealed unit supplies no aura. Other printed combat abilities apply when the card is revealed in combat. Bonuses from different sources add, but multiple Standard Bearer auras do not stack. Rank-6 Veteran Guards never gain positive modifiers.

04 / Terrain and special rulings

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Terrain effects

Plain: no general modifier. Forest: a defender gains +1 Rank. Fort: a defender gains +1 Rank. Pass: no general modifier; printed Pass abilities may apply. Crossing: walkable, no modifier. Supply and Camp: walkable, no combat modifier. River: impassable. Each space has exactly one terrain type.

Concealment

Conceal means turn a face-up mobile unit face down in its current space. It never changes owner or position and opponents may remember its identity. Already-concealed units may be selected but gain no extra effect. Concealment effects require no adjacent enemies at the time that unit is concealed. Command Camps are excluded.

Ambush and auras

A Hidden Detachment checks whether it was concealed at the instant an attack was declared, even if later revealed. Its +2 applies on attack or defence. A Standard Bearer benefits orthogonally adjacent friendly Infantry only, never itself. It must be face up before declaration; combat reveals do not retroactively activate its aura for that combat.

Commanders and cancellation

Bai Qi checks for another adjacent friendly unit at declaration; a friendly Camp does not count. Li Mu can retreat only the targeted mobile unit, to an adjacent empty walkable space. Its orientation is unchanged. The attacker does not follow. Cancelled combat consumes committed stratagems and their action. An ability that has already been spent is never refreshed.

Supply and complete effects

Only the active player checks Supply at the beginning of their turn; controlling both gives no additional benefit. If an order requires a specific friendly unit type, reveal the chosen unit before resolving it. Stratagem attacks follow the normal declaration window. Skip a later optional instruction if it has no legal target. No effects return casualties or create units.

Illustrative combat

A concealed Zhao Hidden Detachment (Rank 3) defending in Forest gains +2 from its printed ability and +1 from Forest: total 6. Qin Veteran Guard attacks at 6 and cannot gain bonuses; both are removed on the tie. These are deterministic results, not dice rolls.

05 / The battlefield

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Symmetrical 5 x 9 grid with two river crossings. This is a fictional frontier battlefield. Terrain and connections below are authoritative for v0.1. All orthogonally adjacent walkable spaces connect.

ZHAO / DEPLOY ROWS 7-9

A9 Plain	B9 Plain	C9 Camp	D9 Plain	E9 Plain
A8 Plain	B8 Plain	C8 Plain	D8 Plain	E8 Plain
A7 Plain	B7 Forest	C7 Fort	D7 Forest	E7 Plain
A6 Pass	B6 Plain	C6 Plain	D6 Supply	E6 Pass
A5 River	B5 Crossing	C5 River	D5 Crossing	E5 River
A4 Pass	B4 Supply	C4 Plain	D4 Plain	E4 Pass
A3 Plain	B3 Forest	C3 Fort	D3 Forest	E3 Plain
A2 Plain	B2 Plain	C2 Plain	D2 Plain	E2 Plain
A1 Plain	B1 Plain	C1 Camp	D1 Plain	E1 Plain

QIN / DEPLOY ROWS 1-3

Physical mat target: 900 x 1000 mm. Portrait card slots use a 75 x 98 mm pitch, forming a 375 x 882 mm field. A 63 x 88 mm card leaves handling clearance; check your actual sleeve dimensions before manufacture. Side rails hold the commander, deck, discard and casualties. The map above is schematic, not an actual-size print mat.

Playtest questions: Are the two crossings too easy to lock? Does first-player initiative dominate? Is scouting worth an action? Are the 15-card armies too crowded? Test all four commander matchups, alternating first player, before changing ranks or printing final artwork.

Qin / Starter inventory

DESIGN PROTOTYPE v0.1 / 13 OCTOBER 2026

Choose ONE commander

- 1x WS-001 Bai Qi
- 1x WS-002 Wang Jian

Deploy ALL fifteen army cards

- 1x WS-005 Qin Command Camp
- 2x WS-006 Qin Spear Line
- 2x WS-007 Qin Shield Wall
- 2x WS-008 Qin Conscripts
- 1x WS-009 Qin Crossbow Corps
- 1x WS-010 Qin Veteran Guard
- 1x WS-011 Qin Mounted Patrol
- 1x WS-012 Qin Forward Scouts
- 1x WS-013 Qin Field Engineers
- 1x WS-014 Qin Pass Garrison
- 1x WS-015 Qin Hidden Detachment
- 1x WS-016 Qin Standard Bearers

Shuffle TWELVE stratagems

- 2x WS-029 Encircling Manoeuvre
- 2x WS-030 Crossbow Volley
- 2x WS-031 Forced March
- 2x WS-032 Probe the Line
- 2x WS-033 Rally the Ranks
- 2x WS-034 Siege Detail

Zhao / Starter inventory

DESIGN PROTOTYPE v0.1 / 13 OCTOBER 2026

Choose ONE commander

- 1x WS-003 Lian Po
- 1x WS-004 Li Mu

Deploy ALL fifteen army cards

- 1x WS-017 Zhao Command Camp
- 2x WS-018 Zhao Spear Line
- 2x WS-019 Zhao Shield Guard
- 2x WS-020 Zhao Levy
- 1x WS-021 Zhao Crossbow Watch
- 1x WS-022 Zhao Veteran Guard
- 1x WS-023 Zhao Frontier Riders
- 1x WS-024 Zhao Border Scouts
- 1x WS-025 Zhao Field Engineers
- 1x WS-026 Zhao Pass Guard
- 1x WS-027 Zhao Hidden Detachment
- 1x WS-028 Zhao Standard Bearers

Shuffle TWELVE stratagems

- 2x WS-035 Concealed March
- 2x WS-036 Cavalry Sweep
- 2x WS-037 Local Guides
- 2x WS-038 Frontier Intelligence
- 2x WS-039 Restore Formation
- 2x WS-040 Counterstroke