

Petty Fiefs

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Version: 0.1.2β, August 14, 2006

Players: 2 to 5

Equipment: *Two different* piecepack suits are needed for each player, *plus one additional different piecepack suit*. This is a total of five suits in a two-player game, seven suits in a three-player game, nine suits in a four-player game and eleven suits in a five-player game. Which *particular* suits are used doesn't matter, but *at least one* expansion suit is necessary. All of the pieces from all of the suits (including the pawns) need to be easily distinguishable by color and/or pattern, so the playing card expansions from some piecepack manufacturers are probably not appropriate for use in *Petty Fiefs*.

PETTY FIEFS

Summary

Minor princes pit bands of vassals and fickle mercenaries against one another in a struggle to possess the largest and most valuable tracts of land. Later, the princes build and upgrade castles to secure control of their expanding realms. The player whose *weaker* prince has the strongest, most valuable fiefdom wins.

Setup

- A. **Distribute Player Pieces** – Each player takes the coins, pawns, dice and null tiles from two *different* piecepack suits. Players place all of their pieces in reserve areas in front of them. The pieces must be in full view and the null tiles kept face-up, but the coins should be kept face-down. The pawns represent the two princes that each player controls. The coins represent bands of vassals that fight for their respective princes. The dice represent the princes' castles, with the uppermost pip indicating the castle's current strength. The null tiles are markers to show which prince controls a province that doesn't currently have a castle.
- B. **Mercenaries to the Center** – The face-down coins, pawn and die from the extra piecepack suit are grouped near the center of the play area. The extra suit pawn represents the fickle mercenary warlord. The extra suit coins represent bands of mercenaries that fight for the warlord. The extra suit die begins the game as a marker to show which prince is currently paying (and in control of) the fickle mercenaries, but at the end of the game the extra suit die must be built as a castle for the warlord.
- C. **Region Tile Draw Piles** – Shuffle all of the remaining tiles (ace through five in each of the player's suits and null through five in the extra suit), and arrange them in several face-down draw piles within easy reach. The individual tiles are small regions that make up the various provinces that the princes are struggling to control. In the final scoring, provinces containing region tiles controlled by a prince of the matching suit yield a small bonus.

Play

A game of *Petty Fiefs* takes place in two phases – Lay of the Land and Contention. Of the two, Contention is the longer and more involved phase, but both phases offer some unique tactical opportunities. In particular, paying attention to tile placements during the Lay of the Land phase helps players form a conquest strategy for use during the Contention phase.

Lay of the Land

Randomly choose one player to be the start player. (There is no significant advantage to going first.) The land is laid out in several separate provinces arranged in a circle around the central area, which in turn is reserved for pieces representing the mercenaries. Each province is made up of one or more region tiles. Beginning with the start player and continuing clockwise, each player in turn draws one tile from any of the face-down draw piles, looks at it, then places it face-down in the circle, either by itself as a new province or attached to an already existing province, with the following restrictions:

- A. **No Stacking** – All region tiles must lie flat on the playing surface.
- B. **Five Region Tiles** – During the Lay of the Land phase, the maximum size of any one province is five region tiles.
- C. **Suits Plus Two Provinces** – The maximum number of provinces is equal to the number of suits plus two.

Players continue drawing, observing and laying region tiles until all of the draw piles are exhausted. Any extra region tiles are out of play for the rest of the game. The layout of the individual region tiles within each province doesn't matter, so compact shapes are the most convenient. The circular order of existing provinces may not change; however, new provinces *may* be built *between* two existing provinces, subject to the above restrictions.

Lay of the Land ends with the warlord and princes being placed. Beginning with the next player in turn after the last region tile was laid, each player places their princes into any provinces they choose, one per turn. The last player to place a prince also places the warlord into any province as part of the same move. The specific region tile within a province where a prince is placed does not matter, and multiple princes, even princes belonging to different players, may occupy the same province. However, during the Lay of the Land phase, there may be no more princes and/or warlords in any one province than there are players in the game. Once the Lay of the Land phase is complete, the Contention phase begins.

Contention

Beginning with the next player in turn and continuing clockwise, each player in turn may take *any three* of the following actions. Players may take the same action three times, or two or three different actions as they wish.

- A. **Bribe Mercenaries** – Place *one coin* from your reserve area face-down into the center area, and retrieve one *randomly drawn* band of mercenaries from among the extra suit coins remaining in the center (if any). After looking at the coin, place it in your reserve area. Whichever *player* then has the most face-down coins in the center area (i.e., the total for *both suits*) receives the mercenary control marker (the extra die), with ties favoring the player who already has the control marker.
- B. **Move Princes & Warlord** – Move *one or both* of your princes *one or two* provinces clockwise. If you currently have the mercenary control marker, you may also move the warlord pawn *one or two* provinces clockwise as part of the same action. The positioning of the pawns within provinces does not matter. If, at the *end* of its movement, the arrival of your prince or the warlord triggers a conflict (see Conflicts & Resolution below), then resolve the conflict before any further action. By making a two-step move, a prince or warlord *may* bypass a province where a conflict otherwise would have been triggered.
- C. **Deploy Vassals** – Place a total of *up to two coins* from your reserve area face-down onto *one or both* of the provinces with the matching princes. Exception: bands of mercenaries *from your reserve* may be deployed to *any* province without restriction, even if there are no other pieces in the target province. If the arrival of one of your bands of vassals or mercenaries triggers a conflict (see Conflicts & Resolution below), then resolve the conflict before any further action. Players may freely examine their own bands of vassals, but any coins not currently involved in a conflict resolution should be kept face-down. Players may only examine bands of mercenaries that are in their own reserve areas.
- D. **Retrieve Vassals** – Remove *any number* of *your own* coins from the provinces where *your matching prince pawns* are located, and return them to your reserve area face-down. If you currently have the mercenary control marker, you may also remove *any number* of *bands of mercenaries* from the province where the *warlord pawn* is located as part of the same action. Mercenary bands may be removed *even if they were placed there by another player*. All removed coins are returned to your reserve area face-down.
- E. **Build a Castle** – In a province your prince controls, but in which there is *no castle*, place one of *your own* coins *from your reserve area* (i.e., *not* a band of mercenaries) in that province along with the matching die *from your reserve area* with the null face uppermost, then return the matching

- null tile to your reserve area. Your prince need not be present in a province to build a castle there.
- F. **Expand a Castle** – In a province where your prince *already has a castle*, place one of *your own* coins *from your reserve area* (i.e., *not* a band of mercenaries) in that province, then increase the number on the uppermost face of the matching castle by one (i.e., null becomes ace, which may later expand to two, and so on up to a maximum value of five). Your prince need not be present in a province to expand a castle.
- F. **Annex Adjacent Province** – During the Contention phase, there is no longer a limit on the size of a single province. If one of your princes has a *castle* in one province and also *controls an adjacent* province, the two provinces may be combined into one larger province. After the annexation, return the matching null tile to your reserve area, but leave the existing castle in the new larger province. If the annexation triggers a conflict (see Conflicts & Resolution below), then resolve the conflict before any further action. Annexation is *permanent*, and the combined provinces may not be separated, even if the province is later abandoned. Your prince need not be present in either province to affect annexation.
- G. **Demolish a Castle** – Each prince may only have *one* castle, but sometimes a new area seems like a more favorable location. A prince *in the same province as his castle* may freely demolish that castle and return the matching die to the reserve area.
- H. **Pass** – As long as there are no unresolved conflicts, not taking an action is allowed, even if other actions are possible.

Conflicts & Resolution

The moment that a province contains as many pieces (possibly including princes, castles, vassals, mercenaries and the warlord), as there are *players in the game plus one*, a conflict is triggered if *any two* of those pieces are from different suits. This is true *even if* both of the only involved suits are controlled by the same player. The following steps are completed in order to resolve the conflict:

- A. **If Necessary, Determine Mercenary & Warlord Allegiance** – *If and only if* the pawn or coins belonging to the *extra suit* are present in the conflicted province, the allegiance of the mercenaries and warlord needs to be resolved before continuing. If neither mercenaries nor the warlord are involved, skip ahead to item B. below. Otherwise:
1. **Expose Bribes** – Turn *all* of the bribery coins in the central area *face-up*.
 2. **Determine Largest Bribe** – The player who played the *highest total value* of bribery coins of *a single suit* in the central area *immediately* takes the mercenary control marker, with ties favoring the player who already has the control marker.
 3. **Retrieve Bribes** – Coins in the central area in *all suits* are returned to their owners' reserve areas face-down. Determining the mercenary and warlord allegiance is the *only* way for players to retrieve coins from the central area.
- B. **Expose Coins** – *All* of the coins in the conflicted province are turned *face-up*.
- C. **Compare Strengths** – Total the values of all of the coins, pawns and castles *in each suit separately*. Prince pawns are worth *one* extra point, and the warlord pawn is worth *six* extra points. *All* of the mercenary and warlord points go to the player with the mercenary control marker, *even if* that player has no other pieces in the contested province. The *suit* with the highest total strength (possibly including points from the mercenaries and/or warlord) wins control of the province.
- D. **Mark Province** – The control marker *of the suit that won control of the province* is added to the conflicted province. This happens *even if* that very null tile was already in use as a control marker in some other province. Control of the other province is immediately *forfeited*. Any other control marker or castle that was already in the province is returned to its owner's reserve area.
- E. **Conceal Vassals** – All of the coins *of the suit that won control of the province* are left in the conflicted province and are turned face-down. Any princes and the warlord (if present) also remain in the conflicted province.
- F. **Retrieve Vassals** – Coins from *all other suits* are returned to their owners' reserve areas face-down. *Regardless* of whether they were on the winning side or not, *all* bands of mercenaries in the conflicted province are returned to the *central area* (*not* to the player with the mercenary control marker) face-down.

- G. **Expose One Region Tile** – The player who now controls the province turns *one unexposed region tile* (if there are any remaining in this province) face-up.

Game End & Winning

At the end of the player's turn in which all of the provinces are controlled by princes (regardless of the presence or absence of castles), the game ends. At that point, the following steps are completed in order to determine the winner:

- A. **Warlord Province** – All of the *already exposed* region tiles of the *extra suit* are removed from their provinces to form a *new province* in the center for the fickle warlord and his mercenaries.
- B. **Expose Tiles** – Turn any remaining unexposed region tiles *face-up*.
- C. **Calculate Points** – Total the points for *each suit separately* according to the following schedule:
1. Region tiles in *non-matching suits* are worth *their values in points*,
 2. Region tiles in the *matching suits* are worth *their values plus two bonus points each*,
 3. Deployed *bands of vassals* and *prince pawns* in the *matching suit* are worth *one point each*, regardless of the coin values,
 4. Deployed *bands of mercenaries*, the *warlord pawn*, *coins and pawns in non-matching suits* and any coins of the *matching suit* that remain in the central area (bribe coins) are worth *negative one point each*,
 5. If the prince pawn is in the *same province* as its castle, the castle is worth *twice its value in points*, but if the matching prince pawn is *not present*, a castle is only worth *its value in points*,
 6. Provinces are worth bonus points equal to *the number of region tiles* they contain, and
 7. Everything in the *reserve areas*, which may include non-deployed bands of vassals and mercenaries, unbuilt castles and extra null tiles, is worth *nothing*.
- D. **Winning** – The player whose *lowest-scoring* prince had the *highest point total* wins the game. If there is a tie, the win is awarded to the player whose *lowest-scoring* prince had the most valuable castle, then the single largest province, then the most matching region tiles.

Acknowledgments

Players familiar with contemporary European games will recognize elements from previously existing games. Most notably, I have adapted the province ownership and combination mechanic from Leo Colovini's excellent *Carolus Magnus*, and adapted the blind local area majority mechanic from another Colovini game, *Doge*. Others will no doubt recognize that the "largest minimum" mechanic for determining a winner was inspired by Reiner Knizia's masterpiece, *Tigris & Euphrates*. These and other contemporary game designers have been a great inspiration in my own game designs. Some say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

Play Test Team

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