

# Black Banners — Condotta & Crowns

Wargame Expansion for Fate's Edge

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## I. Introduction: The Theater of Banners

### A. Core Concept

**War as Social Theater.** In Fate's Edge, battles are brief flashes. The story lives in the hours before and after: payroll arguments, muddy roads, who eats, who prays, who runs. Camps, fords, and counting-tents are the true stages of war.

**Mercenaries as Narrative Bridges.** Bannered companies move between courts, ports, and steppes. They tie urban intrigue to caravan legs, wilderness marches, and political endgames. Hire them, join them, outmaneuver them—either way, banners connect arcs.

**The Condotta System.** Contracts (condotte) are adventures in legal clothing: clauses, riders, sureties, and scheduled betrayals. This module gives you fast procedures to play the deal, the march, and the clash with the same tools as core Fate's Edge (Position / DV / Effect, Strings, and clocks).

### B. Design Philosophy

**Camp Over Clash.** Put logistics, medicine, and morale on the table. The camp is where choices compound; the clash is where they're cashed.

**Contracts as Stories.** A charter's margins foreshadow your next session. Every clause is a future scene; every omission, a future wound.

**Dynamic Loyalties.** Allegiances shift without spreadsheets. One die per scene nudges fortune, pay, politics, and position.

**Cross-Arc Integration.** Banners bring Diamonds (leverage), Clubs (pressure), Hearts (people), and Spades (places) to any arc: court, road, hedge, harbor.

### C. Quickstart Summary

- Two-Minute Setup**
- Condotta Crossroads: Put two conflicting charters on the table. Ask who you disappoint first.
  - Company Sheet: Name, Colors, Captain, Cohorts. Add Payday [4], Supply [4], Cohesion [6].
  - Pressure Clocks: Pick two externals (e.g., Skirmish Spiral [6], Camp Despair [6]).
  - Allegiances in Flux: At each scene start, roll 1d6 and apply the twist.
  - Honor Pragmatism: Slide the dial to reflect recent choices; gain a boon, pay a cost.
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## Lore: The Black Banners

“The contract is the road. The colors are the promise. The pay-chest is the prayer.”

The Black Banners are not one company but a league—a loose commonwealth of mercenary outfits that share camp law, pay customs, and a habit of turning up wherever the map is loud. Their colors are always some device on black: a lantern, a thorn, a bell, a fishbone, a broken scale. Black means coin before crown; witness before oath.

They are the thread that stitches frontiers to courts, caravan roads to siege lines. Ask five people who the Black Banners are and you’ll hear five truths: quartermasters who can feed a ghost army; paymasters who count twice; raiders with rules; peacekeepers who charge rent; undertakers who sing.

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### Origins & Reputation

- **Birth at the Crossroads.** The first “black” standards reportedly gathered during a famine campaign when city militias and steppe hosts both ran out of grain. A broker chalked clauses on wagon boards; those who signed swore to take coin, keep order, and leave exits. Black cloth was used because no city would lend its colors.
  - **Four Sacks of Ecktoria.** The empire counts four humiliations as “sacks.” The banners will say—privately—that the gates opened for Vilikari cohorts and Banners logistics, not for steppe charges. It was a war of ledgers, ferries, and night roads...and the empire paid late every time.
  - **Fierce, but priced.** Their reputation is a machine: frightening enough to deter trouble, disciplined enough to be rentable, and bound by camp law that courts grudgingly respect.
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### Articles of the Camp (the Eight You Hear Aloud)

- A. Payday comes before parley. No pay, no move.
- B. Leech and bell are sacred. Healers and chaplains travel untouched.
- C. Colors at dawn, not at night. Sacks and changes of allegiance happen in light, with a witness.
- D. Prisoners eat. Ransom or release; no starving.
- E. The broker is a bridge. Don’t kill bridges.
- F. Take no road you won’t defend. (Some add: “Leave two exits; take one.”)
- G. No fire in the hospital quarter. Even if the enemy runs through it.
- H. Count twice. Coin, bodies, promises.

Breaking an Article earns a Black Mark—a stigma that travels faster than mail. Three Black Marks and no reputable broker will carry your charter without triple surety.

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### How They See War

- **Camp before clash.** A battle is the interest on debts a captain accrued in camp: food, route, weather, rumor. If those sums are wrong, steel won’t save you.

- **Contracts as maps.** A condotta (charter) isn't just payment—it's terrain in sentences: rights of passage, shares of salvage, witness duties, who feeds prisoners and at what rate. Good captains can march through a clause.
  - **Loyalties in motion.** They do change sides, but by rule: daylight, drum, witness, surety paid. The gutter word is "treachery." The banner word is "rider fulfilled."
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## The Four Faces of a Banner (Hearts)

- **Captain.** Judge of risk and reputation. The best can smell a forged clause and a storm in the same breath.
- **Quartermaster.** The real warlord. Controls Supply, hates surprises, loves rain barrels.
- **Surgeon/Leech.** Holds morale together with needles, vinegar, and songs. Chooses who lives when coin runs out.
- **Scout/Sergeant.** Decides if today is a straight road or an honest ambush.

If Hearts are rotten, no Spade (place), Club (pressure), or Diamond (writ) will save you.

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## Colors, Devices, & Cant

**Common devices:** lantern, bell, thorn, chain, fishbone, ladder, broken bit, river-stone, empty ring.

### Cant phrases:

- "Black's the bargain." (We do this for pay, not love.)
  - "Lantern high." (We act under witness.)
  - "Count on copper." (Do it the hard way; stop promising silver.)
  - "Two weights, one truth." (Say the public price and the real one.)
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## Famous Companies & Rumors

- **The Iron Lanterns.** Siege specialists who promise no fire in hospitals and keep it. They claim to have taken five cities with fewer dead than one bad winter.
- **Thornwrights.** Sappers and road-cutters who price bridges by the breath—your breath at the gallop.
- **Bone & Bell.** Undertaker company; they bury both sides by the book and take payment in coin, land, or lineage favors.
- **The Fifth Pay-Chest.** An administrative company that "escorts" money and occasionally a colonel's conscience.
- **Sea Charters.** Colors on black sails; swear by Blue Moot tariffs; infamous for opening blockades with paperwork and weather.

**Rumor:** A captain called the Bannerless One walks with no colors and settles Payday by sheer presence. Those who accept their help wake with coin...and a debt that isn't money.

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## Brokers, Prefects, and Other Power

- **Condotta Brokers.** They draft the charters, carry news, hold surety. Killing a broker is like burning a bridge: possible, unforgettable, and expensive for a decade.
  - **River Prefects.** Stamps that open bridges—once. Prefects sell time more than passage; banners pay dearly.
  - **City Factors.** Neutral accountants; they read your ledger aloud and write you back into polite society—for a price and a favor. Many banners owe them Price of Neutrality.
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## Faith & Rites

- **Bell-Tokens.** Camp chaplains carry small bells strung with bone or copper. Three bells rung at dawn means a general amnesty for the morning: bury dead, trade prisoners, fix wells, no ambush. Violating a Bell Dawn is how legends end badly.
  - **The Surgeon's Right.** A leech can claim any blade or cloth in arm's reach during a procedure. Interfere and the nearest captain is obligated to cut you down or lose face.
  - **Break-Reins Rite.** When leaving a bad charter, a captain hangs a bridle ring on the camp gate. It means: we break this without treachery; pay our arrears, we'll bury your dead. Aveh's riders sometimes attend.
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## Money, Loot, & Shares

- **The Cut.** Standard shares: captain 3; officers 2; soldier 1; specialist  $+ \frac{1}{2}$ . Horses get fed first, surgeons second, then soldiers, then officers, then captains. (Good companies keep it that way.)
  - **Black Chest.** An emergency pay-chest sealed under four keys—captain, quartermaster, leech, and the senior sergeant. Opening it without witness earns a Black Mark.
  - **Repair Years.** When a sack goes lawful but ugly, some companies pay in repair years—labor, stone, seed—rather than coin. It buys reputations you can recruit with.
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## Law & Punishment

- **Articles tribunals.** Verdicts delivered at noon, with the lantern high. Penalties range from dock of shares to branding (a small black banner on the forearm) to drumming out (colors stripped, tools kept).
  - **The Gentle Noose.** A derisive term for “polite” executions: a leather loop drawn until sleep—then a posting to the worst job for a year. Leechs hate it. Prefects love it.
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## Relationships & Politics

- **With Ykrul.** Respect and rivalry. Banners can pay for route rights with repair or coin; Ykrul will grant them if you hold your exits honest. Many Ykrul learned to price routes from banner quartermasters—and many quartermasters learned geometry from Ykrul judges.
  - **With Vilikari.** Symbiosis. Vilikari run night ferries, speak to both ledgers, and make false orders less profitable than a right bribe. Every good banner captain owes a Vilikari countkeeper at least one feast.
  - **With Ecktoria.** The empire hires, audits, and denounces—often in that order. Ecktorian “corrections” improve Position but put Black Marks on captains who say no.
  - **With Aeler.** Hire for stone and siege; pay in repair contracts and courtesy. Break a keystone charter once and all mountain roads become expensive.
  - **With Lethai.** Tricky. Lethai-al will deal if you respect hedges, bell dawns, and seed dues. Lethai-ar offer night work at good rates and terrible luck.
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## Seasons & Omens

- **Winter:** loyalty crystallizes or shatters. Good captains winter under charter; bad ones invent taxes.
  - **Storm Season:** the Blue Moot opens sea lanes or closes them. Sea Charters thrive; everyone else writes smaller letters.
  - **Omens:** a lantern that won’t light before parley; a bell that rings once with no wind; a pay-chest key that twists warm in a pocket.
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## What Everyone Knows / What Captains Know / What Only Leeches Say

**Everyone:** They fight for pay but keep rules that make them safer than warlords.

**Captains:** The real battle is Payday and Supply; break neither and you can lose three skirmishes and still win the war.

**Leeches:** If the camp sings, you live. If they stop singing, even the best charter bleeds.

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## Adventure Sparks

- **Lantern High at Noon.** A broker calls a bell dawn to arbitrate a massacre blamed on your colors. Find the forger, save the Articles, or carry a Black Mark forever.
- **The Fifth Chest.** Someone stole the black chest and left everyone’s keys in their boots. Recover it before Cohesion unravels.
- **Price of Neutrality.** City factors demand a favor: escort a despised official through your own angry camp during Short Rations.
- **The Bannerless One.** A quiet person clears your Payday problems and asks only for a prisoner you’d rather keep. Choose mercy, honor, or coin—then count the cost.

- **Bridge by Bell.** Blue Moot offers one bell-token to reopen a war-closed bridge for a watch. Who crosses first writes a season's history.
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## Using the Black Banners in Your Campaign

Drop a bannered company anywhere you need stakes with rules. They carry their own courts, hospitals, road crews, and songs. In intrigue arcs, they're leverage; in caravan legs, they're escorts or competitors; in wilderness play, they keep the wolves fed and the fires small; in political campaigns, they are the deniable arm of policy, standing under black to make the colors behind them look clean.

The secret of the Black Banners is simple: they turn war back into agreements. And agreements—like bridges—are only as strong as the people who keep them in the wind.

## II. Core Mechanics Framework

### A. The Four-Suit System

**Hearts (People).** Faces for your theater:

- Captain: command, parley, risk.
- Quartermaster: supply, pay, scavenge.
- Surgeon/Leech: harm control, disease, morale.
- Scout/Sergeant: terrain, ambush, tempo.

Use Hearts to bind scenes to stakes: who bleeds if this goes wrong?

**Spades (Places).** Position and Effect live in terrain: frozen fords, rain-cut roads, half-built siegeworks, forest lanes under truce. Spades name the rule of the ground and what it does to dice.

**Clubs (Pressures).** The SB menu of war: false orders, cut lines, camp-fever, gear breakage, rival aid that arrives late and loud, political “help.” Clubs are how the Keeper spends setbacks.

**Diamonds (Leverage).** Fictional assets that bypass a roll once when you pay the price: safe-conducts, bridge priority stamps, debt notes, dispensation writs, blood-truce witnesses. Put at least one Diamond in every scene.

Use in play: At the top of a leg, draft one of each suit. Highest rank sets a major clock (4/6/8/10). Any Ace = winter & loyalty motif: expect hunger, omen, promotion-by-attribution.

### B. Company Sheet Structure

[COMPANY NAME] — [COLORS/BANNER]

Captain: [NAME]

Ledger: What we owe / Who owes us

Cohorts: Scouts • Sappers • Surgeons • Foragers • Skirmishers

#### TRACKS:

- Payday [4] — missed pay, bad terms, seized chests → desertion risk
- Supply [4] — weather, marches, sabotage → worse Position on maneuvers
- Cohesion [6] — losses, betrayals, humiliation → mutters → fractures

Ledger Notes (Strings): broker's favor • bridge priority • chapel bell-token • banner voucher  
• ford right (season). These are receipts you can spend.

## C. Track Management

- **Payday.** Tick for missed coin, broken promises, stolen chest, or a “creative” delay. On fill: a squad peels off, a veteran sells secrets, or the next Allegiances roll is with disadvantage (take the worse of two).
  - **Supply.** Tick for hard weather, forced march, siege diet, or sabotage. While Supply 3, all risky maneuvers start one step worse Position unless you bring a Diamond to bear (scavenge, requisition, dispensation).
  - **Cohesion.** Tick for public humiliation, ugly losses, officer feuds, or moral injury. When Cohesion hits 0–1, the Keeper may convert the first 1 SB each scene into Desertion, Brawl, or Refusal until you repair.
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## III. Loyalty and Allegiance Systems

### A. Allegiances in Flux (1d6, scene start)

- Condotta Flip. Rival charter offers better terms. Take it: gain Black Mark [1] with the old patron. Refuse: tick Payday.
- Ykrul Counter-offer. Accept an exit-rich but costly route: start Obligation [2] you must pay in concessions later; refuse and tick Payday.
- Vilikari Shortcut. +1 Effect on this maneuver via night roads; Keeper gains 1 banked SB to spend as Hostile Terrain this scene.
- Ecktorian “Correction.” March under “imperial guidance”: +1 Position this scene or take a Black Mark [1] for defiance.
- False Orders. Clubs rain down. First command this scene risks misinterpretation unless countered with a Diamond (cipher, cantor, witness).
- Bannerless One. A myth-wrapped fixer clears Payday by 1—but starts Price of Mercy [2]. It will come due (prisoner release, repair years, or a refused sack).

Note: Allegiances events are biases, not dictates. They tilt Position/DV, start clocks, or offer bargains.

### B. Honor vs. Pragmatism Dial

[HONOR] ←— 0 —→ [PRAGMATISM]

- Honor (left). +1 Position in parley/oaths; logistics burn faster (tick Supply on a partial where you’d normally be safe).
- Pragmatism (right). +1 Effect in ambush/sabotage; social starts one step worse Position when oaths/witnesses matter.

Centering Actions: pay arrears on-screen; return prisoners with witness; fulfill a broken writ at cost. Move the dial one step toward center.

## C. Loyalty Management

- **Black Marks.** Track public betrayals and insulted patrons. At 3, your Diamonds cost more: each use adds Political Pressure [1].
  - **Favor Debts.** Who owes you? Who do you owe? Record as Strings. Each unpaid Favor at arc's end ticks Cohesion once (soldiers smell unpaid debts).
  - **Reputation Shifts.** Recruiting in civilized ports favors Honor; hiring in hard fronts favors Pragmatism. Slide the dial to attract what you want.
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## IV. Camp Life Procedures

### A. Weekly Entanglements (choose 2 per leg)

#### A. Condotta Brokers' Syndicate

- Register colors and surety to bank Broker's Favor (parley DV 1 in camp).
- Skip registration: gain Unauthorized Colors—the Keeper can spend the first SB at a checkpoint as False Orders.

#### B. Camp Quartermasters

- Accept audits: cancel the next Supply tick on this leg.
- Refuse: start Short Rations [4]; while active, marching starts one Position worse.

#### C. Field Chaplains & Leech-Circles

- Tithe time or coin: clear Camp-Fever [1] each day, and the Keeper cannot convert the first 1 SB into Disease/Death this leg.
- Neglect: on the first Clubs spend, camp-fever blooms.

#### D. Steppe Envoys

- Keep rites (salt/water/shade): bank Remount Rights (once: +1 Effect on retreat/rapid redeploy).
- Break rites: gain Soured Oath (parley DV +1 with steppe peoples) until you repair with a gift or witness.

#### E. Hill Truce-Holders

- Stones-circle witness: bank Blood-Truce (cancel one hill ambush or demand parley).
- Violate: begin Guest Right Forfeit [4]; when it fills, locals refuse aid or safe passage.

### B. Soft-Power Integration

- **River Prefect Stamps.** Spend to claim Bridge Priority (crossing DV 1 once).
  - **Neutral City Factors.** Reroll a market roll in-camp; start Price of Neutrality [4] (the city expects something back).
  - **Border Monasteries.** Bell-tokens make the first Prisoners/Parley step safer (Position +1). Burn a bell-token for a clean retreat once/arc.
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## V. Combat and Campaign Integration

### A. SB Menu for War (Keeper)

When you roll 1s or on partials/misses, consider:

- False Orders (split unit, wrong target, delay).
- Ally Turns Sides (for a scene or for pay).
- Cut Supply Lines (tick Supply).
- Camp-Fever Outbreak (start or advance disease).
- Gear Failure ( downgrade Effect; force scavenge).
- Reinforcements Arrive (tilt Position against you).
- Authority Intervention (political demand interrupts ops).
- Winter/Loyalty Omens (hard weather; Allegiances roll with disadvantage).

### B. Position/DV Modifiers (fast dials)

- **Weather:** Snow (1 Position), Storm (DV 1 to cross water), Clear (+1 Effect to ranged).
- **Supply:** Short (1 Position on risky maneuvers), Adequate (normal), Surplus (+1 Effect on prepared actions).
- **Morale:** Low (DV 1 to resist fear), Normal, High (+1 Position to hold ground).
- **Terrain:** Familiar (+1 Position), Neutral (normal), Hostile (1 Effect unless you bring a local Diamond).

### C. Campaign Clock Management

#### Primary:

- Payday [4] — financial pressure.
- Supply [4] — logistical pressure.
- Cohesion [6] — morale pressure.

#### Secondary:

- Skirmish Spiral [6] — tit-for-tat escalates into a war neither side budgeted.
- Camp Despair [6] — rumor, grief, and boredom eat discipline.
- Political Pressure [4] — courts, patrons, and prefects add new Prices to Diamonds.

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## VI. Scenario Seeds and Scores

### A. Contract Negotiations — Broker's Table, Two Ledgers

Two charters: one legal and thin, one dirty and rich. Pick one; secret the other as leverage (String). Attempt a synthesis by proposing a repair project that satisfies both—on a miss, start Political Pressure [2] and tick Payday.

## B. Crisis Management

**Plague Ground Sanctification.** Camp-Fever [3/4]; coordinate chaplains, leeches, and a bell-token circle to reset. Each delay ticks Cohesion; success restores one step toward Honor.

**Banner Swap in the Wind.** Colors change mid-skirmish; prove command while False Orders fly. Claim a Diamond (cipher, cantor, or witness) to hold line-of-command.

## C. Leadership Challenges — Field Promotion

A shattered unit's warrant lands in your lap. You inherit their Payday [2/4], Supply [1/4], and Black Mark [1]. Keep them intact for a leg and you gain Veteran Network (a permanent contact).

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# VII. Cross-System Integration

## A. Political Intrigue

Map condotta clauses to Influence ticks. Broker's Favor spends like a Boon. Black Marks behave like Exposure in social arcs.

## B. Caravan Operations

Quartermaster audits cancel the next Supply tick on a leg. River stamps reduce crossing DV. Vilikari shortcuts give +1 Effect and bank a hostile-terrain SB for the Keeper.

## C. Wilderness Survival

Hill stones-circles serve as safe trailheads (bank a Blood-Truce). Steppe rites (salt/water/shade) affect travel Position. Environmental hazards tick Supply instead of dealing Harm outright.

## D. Urban Adventures

City factors reroll a market roll; guild dispensations act as Diamonds. Municipal politics can rewrite the fine print on your charter mid-arc.

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# VIII. Character Options and Roles

## A. Company Roles

### Captain (leadership).

- Command, parley, and dial control.
- Once/scene: convert a No into a Project [4] if you can offer a witness.

### Quartermaster (logistics).

- Supply, audits, requisitions.
- Once/leg: cancel one Supply tick by cashing a String or finding salvage.

#### **Scout/Sergeant (tactics).**

- Recon, ambush, terrain leverage.
- Once/scene: treat hostile ground as neutral if you describe the route.

#### **Surgeon/Leech (support).**

- Harm, disease, morale rituals.
- Once/session: downgrade a fatal consequence to a clock the table can work.

### **B. Specialized Talents**

- **Condotta Veteran (4 XP).** +1 die on contract scenes; spot a forged clause on sight.
  - **Banner Reader (3 XP).** Read enemy disposition from standards; predict one Allegiances result per leg.
  - **Supply Master (5 XP).** Reduce Supply by 2 segments when you secure forage or plunder; scavenge rolls gain Position +1 in hostile terrain.
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## **IX. Campaign Framework**

### **A. Session Zero — Why This War?**

“Ecktorian treasuries bankroll a perpetual border-war they claim to ‘contain,’ while companies sell steel to whomever keeps the books. Between rigid honor codes and steppe pragmatism, mercenaries survive by reading winds, not banners.”

### **B. Arc Progression**

**Act I:** Form up, take the first cheap charter, meet the brokers.

**Act II:** Run lean, juggle loyalties, pay or bleed for Diamonds.

**Act III:** A crisis demands a side; move the dial hard and live with the ledger.

### **C. Legacy Options**

- **Company Reputation** (affects future rates and riders).
  - **Veteran Network** (NPCs become contacts across arcs).
  - **War Stories** (Strings you can cash in other modules as legend).
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## X. GM Toolkit and Procedures

### A. Scene Start Procedure

- A. Roll Allegiances in Flux (1d6).
- B. Apply the twist (tilt Position/DV, start a clock, or offer a bargain).
- C. Check Payday/Supply/Cohesion; surface any on-3+ effects.
- D. Set baseline Position from terrain and the Honor/Pragmatism dial.
- E. Put one Diamond on the table (named, with a clear price).

### B. Pressure Management

**Low:** One primary clock in view; Diamonds plentiful.

**Medium:** Two clocks pressure; Clubs spend once/scene.

**High:** Three clocks hot; Allegiances roll with disadvantage; require witness to make anything stick.

### C. Keeper Cheatsheet

- Allegiances every scene.
- Payday/Supply visible at all times.
- Offer fiction-first Diamonds.
- Spend SB as: False Orders, Ally Turns, Supply Cut, Disease.

### D. Pacing Guidelines

A good banner session breathes:

- 2–3 camp scenes (contracts, audits, rites).
- 1–2 travel scenes (marches, scouts, weather).
- 1 major encounter (battle, crisis, betrayal) with at least one Diamond on the table.