



# THIS MEANS WAR

## *Allegiance: War of Factions*

BY EDWARD BOLME

By the time you read this, a new card game should, according to the manufacturer's schedule, have been launched.

*Allegiance: War of Factions* is the first offering from newcomer Lucid Raven Productions. The company is not releasing *Allegiance* through the traditional distribution chain, selling instead directly to stores, which is why you might not have heard of it—yet.

At first glance, *Allegiance* looks intimidating. The cards are thick with information (the diagram in the rules has up to 16 callouts for a card), the game takes up even more table space than the sprawling *Dune CCG*, and there are five different colors of tokens in the game.

The creators reassure us that *Allegiance* is nowhere near as complex as it looks. The complete rules fill the front and back of an 8 1/2"-by-14" piece of paper (without using five-point type). Lucid Raven claims that two 12-year-olds taught themselves to play within an hour and that experienced gamers can learn the mechanics in about five minutes.

"We were sick of everything out there," said James Grierson, Lucid Raven's director of sales and marketing and *Allegiance* codesigner. "We wanted a game to make us want to play again, something that played like nothing else out there—more of a social game, so we could sit around with our buddies and have a great time."

The basic premise of *Allegiance* is that each player is trying to take control of a city in trouble, using political, economic, and religious influence. Meanwhile, creatures lurk just outside the city and threaten to overrun everyone. Thus, while you're trying to destroy your enemies, you're also forced to cooperate with them to fight the monsters lest everyone lose.

The game is definitely social. It has the same shameless disregard for deal making and double-crossing as *Diplomacy*. You can—and are more or less expected to—bribe other players to see things your way, place bounties on cards, extort the weak, wager on upcoming battles, and renege on deals to your heart's content. The only restric-



tion on these Machiavellian shenanigans is that all deals must be made publicly: no back-room conferences.

Lucid Raven also recommends that couples do not play the game unless they are actively trying to break up with each other.

*Allegiance* uses two draw decks and a third "Wanderers" deck, and you can fill your hand to seven cards each turn. The designers hope that speed decks (those built to tournament minimums) will not have the stamina to dominate competition.

The tournament environment will change monthly, as events and themes affect deck design. For example, one month the monsters might be more powerful or more plentiful. Better yet, as you win tourneys, redeem proofs of purchase, and recruit friends and stores, you gain "influence" on the company's official website, [www.lucidraven.com](http://www.lucidraven.com). As you rise in rank, you can also purchase promo items, T-shirts, cards, and so on. You might even get immortalized on a card.

*Allegiance: War of Factions* is expected to launch June 18, in time for the 2004 Origins International Game Expo in Columbus, OH. The 220-card set will be sold in 12-card booster packs and in 55-card starter decks that include 20 gems and a six-sided die. For more information about *Allegiance*, visit [www.lucidraven.com](http://www.lucidraven.com). U

### WILL ALLEGIANCE SURVIVE?

Odds are against any TCG surviving. It's a tough market for a new game, especially one with no license driving its sales. So, we wondered what makes Lucid Raven Productions think that *Allegiance* will survive when so many other games fail.

First of all, Lucid Raven is not a profit-driven company. To quote marketing director James Grierson, "The main goal is not to be rich; we want to make a game that people want to play. If we break even, we'll be happy."

At companies like Wizards of the Coast and Games Workshop, such a cavalier attitude might cause a marketing director to get summarily executed. In a competitive market like that of TCGs, Lucid Raven's rare outlook—focused somewhere other than the bottom line—is refreshing.

But the company expects that *Allegiance* will prosper. Why? Because of the fan base. Attendees at the 2004 GAMA Trade Show stayed up past 2 A.M. playing *Allegiance* in the demo room. Sure, late-night game playing is common enough at game conventions like Gen Con, but GAMA was a trade show. In Las Vegas. Game-industry insiders chose *Allegiance* over all the temptations of Sin City.

Either that or they'd already lost all their money gambling.