

Tomb of the Ancients

Adventure Board Game



Version 2.16, 3/20/24

Introduction: *Tomb of the Ancients* is a board game about adventure archaeology. Players will buy maps from the market, and use them to search for artifacts in the shifting desert sands. This game is still in beta, and we'd love to hear your thoughts at [Crab Fragment Labs](#).

Players: 2 to 6

Playing Time: 40 minutes

Components:

- 5x5 "Shifting Sands" game board
- 50-card map deck, plus four market cards
- 50 two-color "Sand" tokens (black/white)
 - If you don't have two-color tokens, you can just use two colors.
- Money, approximately \$50, all in singles.

Setting Up:

Place the board in the middle of the table and use the four market cards to create a row of shops alongside it. Arrange the market cards by their value, from 1 to 4 with the largest at the top, as shown in the diagram on the next page.

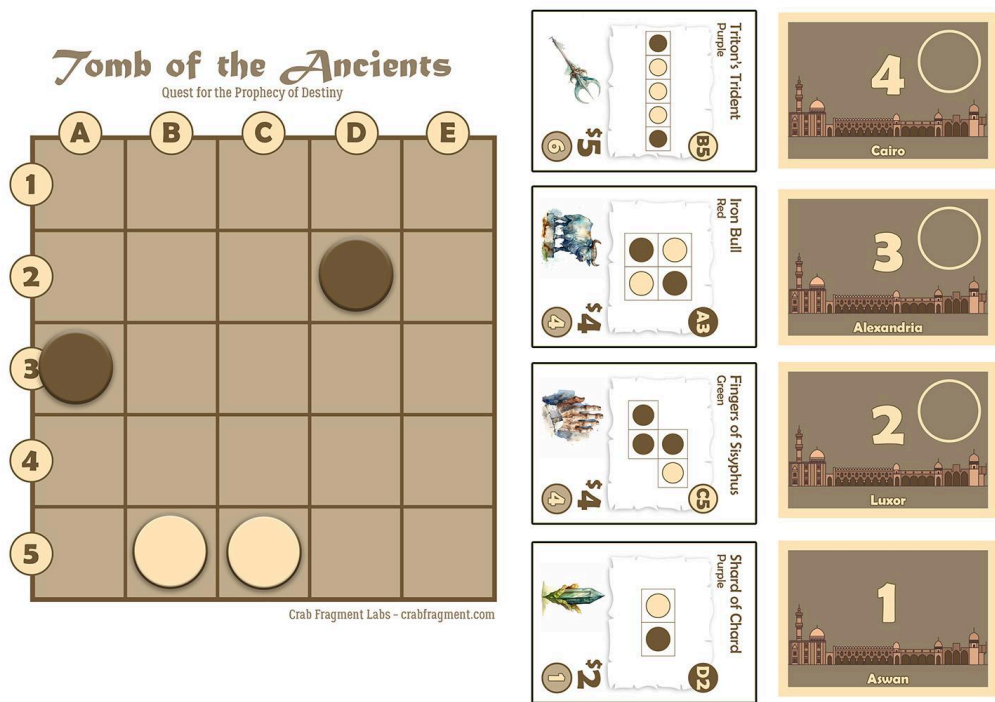
Leave space between the row of market cards and the game board for a row of map cards, one for each. To buy a map in a market stall costs the *price on the stall* (not the price on the card).

Shuffle the deck and deal four map cards into the market, arranging them from highest to lowest as described below. Each map card will also add or subtract sand tokens on the board.

The deck is the timer for the game. After setup, remove cards from the deck as follows:

Players:	2	3	4	5	6
Cards to Remove:	18	10	7	3	0

Each player starts with \$4 and one sand token. Choose a random player to go first. Play will proceed to the left.



The Market:

The four market cards represent four shops, with permanent prices of \$4, \$3, \$2, and \$1. (These might eventually be part of a larger single board, but cards are easy for this test version.) Map cards in the market are always sorted by size, with larger maps belonging in the more expensive shops. The price to buy a map is the number on the shop (not the number on the card), and maps will often move from shop to shop as new ones are added.

During setup, you will deal the first four cards into the market, one at a time. Sort these cards by their *point value*, with larger values going into the higher-priced shops, and smaller values into lower ones. When sorting map cards of the same value, treat the *newer* card as *larger*. Throughout the game, all map cards added into the shops will be sorted in the same way.

Each time a card enters the market, it affects the shifting sands. The space and token color are shown in the upper right of the card. If that space is empty, as it would be at the start of the game, you add a new token to the board (black or white, as indicated). The four cards in the setup above have added four tokens to the board: D2 and A3 in black, and B5 and C5 in white.

If the indicated board space is already occupied by a sand token, then you *remove* the sand token from the board instead, placing it into the largest shop that does not already have one. That token will go to the next player who buys a map from that shop.

Sand tokens belong to their shops and *do not slide with the cards*. Each shop can hold one, except for the value-1 shop. If a token would be added to that shop, return it to the supply.

On Your Turn:

You have three options on your turn. You may buy and sell cards at the *market*, go digging in the *desert*, or *rest*. You can do only one of these three things on your turn.

The Market: At the market you may buy one map and/or sell one artifact from your hand. You will usually visit the market on the first turn of the game. Here are the details of the market:

Selling Cards: You may *sell* one of the artifacts in your hand (these are the cards you unearthed on prior turns), for its marked dollar value.

Buying Cards: To buy a new map, pay the price marked on the shop (not on the card), and place the map card face up on the table in front of you, into your “pack.”

Your pack can hold no more than *four maps*, so if you buy a fifth, you must discard one. (There is no limit on the artifacts you can hold in your hand.)

Sand: If there is a sand token in the shop, you take it along with the map. There is no limit to the number of sand tokens you can carry.

After a card is bought from the market, add a new one from the deck, rearranging the others if necessary as explained above. If the deck is empty, the final round begins (see below).

The Desert: You can dig for buried treasure on the game board, the “shifting sands.” To find an artifact, you must choose a map card and find the matching pattern in the sand.

Finding an Artifact: Locate the pattern in the sand. You may rotate your map in any orientation, but you may not flip it for its mirror image. When you find the artifact, add the card to your hand by flipping it face down. You also *flip every tile in the pattern*.

Multiple Artifacts: You may find several artifacts on the same turn, one at a time. Plan carefully, because flipping one pattern can lead to another.

Spending Sand Tokens: You may spend sand tokens in the desert to change the map. A sand token can be added to a blank space, as either color, or it can be spent (discarded) to flip a token on the board. You can spend as many sand tokens as you wish, at any point in your turn.

Hand Limit: Once discovered, the *maps* in your pack become *artifacts* in your hand, face down. You may carry any number of artifacts, holding them for points, or selling them (one per turn) when you go to the Market.

Resting: If you do nothing else on your turn, you may collect either \$2, or one sand token. When you do this, the market shifts. Discard the card in the 1-value shop, and add a new map card from the deck. If this empties the deck, this will also end the game.

Ending the Game:

The last round begins as soon as the deck is empty. This can happen after any turn when the market is refilled. From this point on, every player will get *one more turn*. Usually people will use this turn to visit the Desert, as at this point there is not much use in buying a new map.

Scoring: Artifacts in your hand are worth their point value. In addition, your remaining money and sand tokens are worth one half point each. The player with the highest score wins.

If there is a tie for high score, the winner is the player who went earlier in the first round.

Strategy: The market and the sands are always changing! You must often adjust your long-term strategy to take advantage of new opportunities.

Look for maps that can lead into each other, and beware of buying a lot of maps of the same color. You want to take the most efficient trips to the desert, and to spend fewer sand tokens, so try to collect maps that can all be found in sequence. You might also try to collect maps that coordinate with the player before you, because they might leave you exactly what you need.

It may seem costly to sell your artifacts just to buy new maps, but this is often the best strategy. Even if a card only nets you \$2 (the same as resting), it can still be more efficient to sell it at the market, because you can also buy a new map on the same turn. That said, sometimes pausing is the best option, especially when nothing in the market is worth a card from your hand.

We hope you enjoy this game and thanks for playing with us!

Playtest Notes: The shifting sands mechanic is fun, and we are trying to keep the rest of the game as simple as possible. Limiters such as buy-one, sell-one, and map limit four, are all in flux, but the core goal is to allow fun multi-dig turns without too much constraint or too many runaway wins. We expect the rules (and cards) to continue changing throughout the beta. If you pay attention to such things, try to notice if the first player ends up with a higher score, and if we need to give all players the same number of turns. We think we shouldn't, but more data is key.

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