



MELTWATER

RULEBOOK

"Restraint? Why are you so concerned with saving their lives? The whole idea is to kill the bastards.

At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian left alive, we win."

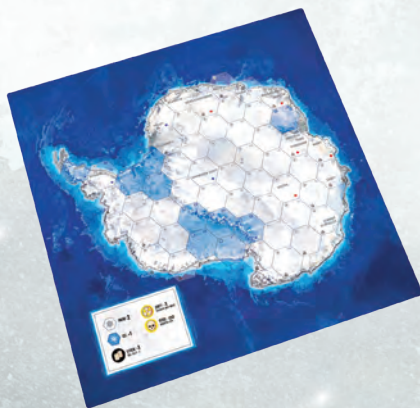
-Gen. Thomas Power, U.S. Strategic Air Command 1957-1964

The unthinkable finally happens. The world is scoured with nuclear fire. The oceans are poisoned for generations to come. One last patch of habitable land remains: Antarctica. The remnants of humanity huddle together in a fragile patchwork of research stations and refugee ships. But even here, the Cold War survives. And we may not.

OBJECTIVE

Annihilate the enemy. You win if your opponent has no surviving units on the map.

COMPONENTS



1 Game board



28 Doomsday cards



56 Radiation/Dead Markers
4 Stockpiles



1 Boat (arriving Refugees)
2 Cloud Tokens (radiation spreads)



8 Soldiers
(4 blue, 4 red)



60 Civilians
(20 blue, 20 red,
20 neutral Refugees)



2 Player Aid Cards

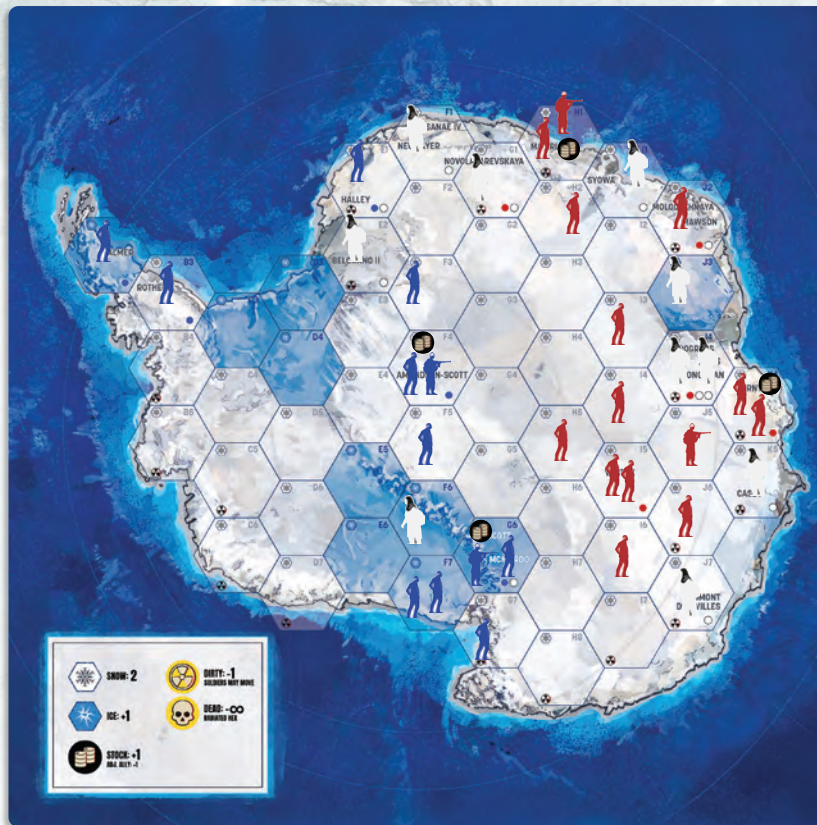
SETUP

Choose to play as the **US (Blue)** or **USSR (Red)**. Neither player controls the Neutral pieces. Then, choose whether the missiles launch in the **Summer** or in the **Winter**. Place units on the board according to the matching diagram (Summer).

Note 1: Radiation tokens may be placed on the map on the spaces which have pre-printed radiation in order to better see these spots during the game.



Note 2: The red/blue/white dots are not important and may be disregarded for gameplay — they are an artifact from an earlier version of the game.



Summer Set Up



SUMMER

- Stockpiles (4):** F4, G6, H1, K4
- Neutral Civilians (10):** E2, F1, F6, G1, I1, J3, J4×2, J7, K5
- Blue Civilians (10):** A2, B3, E1, F3, F4, F5, F7×2, G6, G7
- Red Civilians (12):** H1, H2, H5, I3, I4, I5 x2, I6, J2, J6, K4×2
- Blue Soldiers (2):** F4, G6
- Red Soldiers (2):** H1, J5

WINTER

- Stockpiles (2):** G6, H1
- Neutral Civilians (9):** A2, E2, F1, F6, G1, I1, J3, J7, K5
- Blue Civilians:** B3, E1, F4, G6
- Red Civilians:** H1, I5, J2, J4, K4

Summer is more forgiving. Most Antarctic research stations operate seasonally. Few stations keep a skeleton crew aboard through the harsh, isolating winter.

Next, shuffle the doomsday deck. Place it above the game board. Deal one card faceup next to the deck; this is the current card. Place the remaining pieces in a supply near the board.

The **US (Blue)** player takes the first turn.

OVERVIEW

The game is played over a variable number of rounds, divided into alternating player turns. Each player will take a turn which involves a I. Starvation Phase, II. Action Phase, and III. Doomsday Phase. The following player then takes a turn.

The game will end when only one player has units left on the map or one of the players concedes the win to the other player.

The board is a map of Antarctica, broken into 56 **hexes**. Most hexes are white **snow hexes**, representing the open tundra. A few are blue-tinted **ice shelves** that hold uncontaminated freshwater.



Units are your human resources in Antarctica. There are two types of units - Civilians and Soldiers.

Most units are **Civilians**, plus a small number of **Soldiers**. All units are at risk of **starving**.

Units come in three **colors** representing their allegiance—US (Blue), USSR (Red), and Neutral (White). Units of the same color are **friendly**, while units of Red and Blue are considered enemies. Neutral White units can become units of either side or doomed to their fate. Hexes can only hold units of a single faction (red or blue).



Stockpiles are stashes of food, medicine, and materials. They are not units. Only units check for Starvation. Stockpiles benefit every surrounding hex for your units.

As time passes, **Radiation** spreads across the board. This makes hexes uninhabitable, shrinking play area. Hexes adjacent to **Dead** hexes are **Dirty** with a (-1) penalty. Place a radiation token **into all Dirty** hexes. Civilian units cannot intentionally move into a **Dead** hex; radiation tokens can enter a hex with units. Soldiers may move into **Dead** hexes.

All units are limited to the ones in the supply. **Radiation tokens flip to the Dead side when a second radiation would be placed.**

TURN SEQUENCE

On your turn, as the active player, you must do the following.

- ❶ **STARVATION PHASE:** Resettle starving units.
- ❷ **ACTION PHASE:** Take up to four actions.
- ❸ **DOOMSDAY PHASE:** Resolve the current doomsday card.

Then, pass the turn to your enemy.



STARVATION PHASE

During this phase, each hex on the board can only Support a limited number of pieces— the remainder starve. Starving units escape or die.

Important!

*No one is starving when the game begins.
Skip this phase on the first turn of each player.*

First, each stockpile in a **Dead** hex is **destroyed**. Put it back in the box. Then, check to see if any hex contains more units than it can Support. *Units may leave a Dead hex during the Starvation Phase, following normal rules.*



A **snow hex** can Support two units.



An **ice hex** can Support three units.



Each hex with a **Stockpile**, or adjacent to one, can Support an extra unit.



A **Dirty (radiation) hex** (adjacent to a **Dead** hex) Supports one fewer unit. *These can be printed or pieces.*



A **Dead** hex with a Skull token can't Support any units, regardless of other modifiers (backside of radiation).

Starvation Resolution

Next, choose a starving unit (of any color), if any remain.

The chosen unit must first attempt to **Flee**. If it can't, the unit must **Defect**, if possible. If it can't **Defect**, the unit will **Die**.

Starvation Order of Operations

FLEE

Move the starving unit to an adjacent hex with one or more friendly units, but fewer than the hex can Support. In particular, you cannot cascade from one starving hex to another.

DEFECT

Move the starving unit to an adjacent hex with enemy units, but fewer than the hex can Support. Return the defecting unit to the supply, then replace it with a civilian of the appropriate color.

DIE

The unit **dies**. Return it to the supply.

***A starving unit cannot move to an empty hex for any reason.**

Hex Check

After moving or removing a unit, if a hex can now Support all remaining units, those units are no longer starving.

Repeat checking hexes until there are no starving units left on the board, then proceed to the Action Phase.

*Wandering into the tundra might let a desperate soul
choose hypothermia over starvation or radiation sickness.
But for our purposes, death is death is death.*

MODIFIERS

Each type of **modifier** only applies once to a particular hex.

Example: A hex adjacent to two friendly stockpiles can only Support one extra unit. A **Dirty** hex adjacent to **Dead** hex (flipped radiation) still only suffers a -1 penalty. Different modifiers do stack together: a **Dirty** (-1) ice (+1) hex adjacent to a stockpile (+1) can Support three units total.

Always flip a radiation marker to **Dead** instead of adding a second radiation. Printed radiation counts against this limit of radiation tokens.

STARVATION

If a hex contains more units than it can Support, those units are starving, and the excess units must leave. The current player determines which units leave.

**A unit may transport a single stockpile when fleeing but not defecting.*



ACTION PHASE

Take up to four actions from those listed below.

You may choose different actions or the same action multiple times. You may also pass and forfeit your unused actions.

During this phase, each hex can hold any number of pieces. Support limits do not apply until your next Starvation Phase.

Action Types



MARCH

Choose a hex with your units. Move any number of units and/or stockpiles there to an adjacent hex. You may leave some units and/or stockpiles behind.

Your units and stockpile cannot march into a hex with enemy units. *Only soldiers can march into Dead hexes. Stockpiles always move with a unit.*



THREATEN

Choose a hex with your units that is not adjacent to an enemy soldier.

Target an adjacent hex with fewer units. If you threaten using a soldier,

you may target any adjacent hex, regardless of number.

Move one civilian (of any color) from the target hex to an adjacent hex. The threatened piece cannot move into a hex with any radiation (pieces or symbols) or units of another color.

If a threatened unit cannot move to a valid hex, it **dies**. Return it to the supply.



PRESSGANG

Choose a hex with your soldier not adjacent to an enemy soldier.

Remove a neutral civilian from an adjacent hex. Place a civilian of your color in the same hex with your soldier.*

**You may also pressgang a refugee in the same hex.*

It might be tempting to threaten and intimidate your enemy or neutral civilians, but you can't do so while under the threat of fire. This is why you cannot be next to enemy soldiers when taking these actions.



ATTACK

Choose a hex with your soldier that is adjacent to an enemy soldier.

Both soldiers die. Return them to the supply.

Then, if the attacking soldier's hex is **Dirty**, or if a hex adjacent to either soldier is **Dirty**, flip a token to **Dead** in one of those **Dirty** hexes.

MILITARIZE - ONLY ACTION IF TAKEN

This must be your **first and only** action of the turn. You cannot take any more actions this turn.

Choose a hex with your civilian. It must not be adjacent to any enemy units. Return the civilian to the supply, and replace it with a soldier of your color.

If this action is taken in the Summer, you may replace a second civilian in the same hex with another soldier. Then, end your Action phase.

PASS

You may pass to forfeit the rest of your actions without taking four. Let your enemy know that you have passed.

Once you have performed all your actions, proceed to the Doomsday Phase. This is the end of the Action Phase.



DOOMSDAY PHASE

The active player resolves this phase.

First, resolve the Doomsday Card in the Current slot.

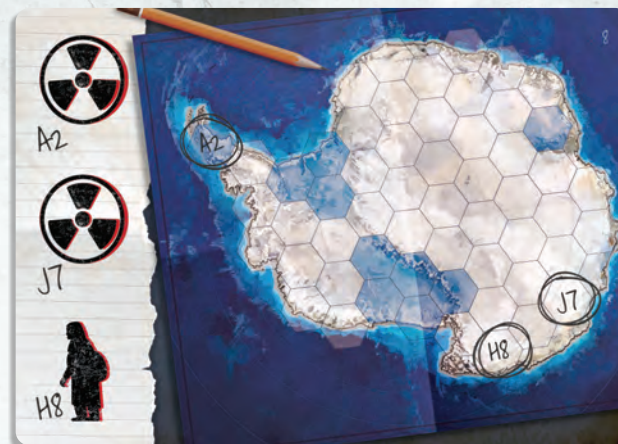
There is no Doomsday on the first turn of the U.S. player. Skip straight to the Action Phase of the U.S.S.R. player.

The Current Card shows three hexes on the map. Place a radiation token in each of the first two hexes (marked by radiation). Check for **Dirty** hexes after placement. A **Dirty** hex will become a **Dead** hex during this phase if: 1. the card places a new radiation token into that space (or) 2. radiation spreads and there are no empty hexes. Place a single radiation token into any new **Dirty** hex.

Place a civilian from supply in the third hex (marked by the civilian silhouette). If any units are already present in the hex, place a civilian of the same color. Otherwise, place a Neutral civilian.

END GAME

If your enemy has no units left on the board, you win immediately— even if your own units would die later in the same turn. *With your last breath, spit on their grave.*



Example Doomsday Card

Radiation Spreads

Then, if there are two radiation tokens in a single hex, flip one to the **Dead** side and move the second token. Move it to a closest hex without a radiation token, if possible. Make sure you keep this second token on the radiation side.

Radiation tokens include **Dirty** hexes printed on the board. In this case, you will need to place a token on the **Dead** side in the space indicated on the card. Then, move a second radiation token to an open hex, as described above.

Radiation spreading may create newly **Dead** hexes if there is no available empty hex.

Advance Doomsday Cards

Last, slide the Next card into the Current slot. Flip a new card faceup on the deck to show the Next card.

To plan for your next round, you can use the two cloud tokens and the refugee boat. Place the cloud tokens in the corresponding spots shown with radiation; place the boat shown by the civilian marker. In this way, you can see where radiation and refugees will be arriving in the future.

Your turn is over, and your enemy takes a turn, starting with the Starvation Phase.

There may come a point in the late game where your opponent is strongly favored or guaranteed to win. If this happens, you might choose to resign with dignity. Your civilians will surrender their identity and become subjects of the victor. Maybe this last scrap of humanity can now fortify the coasts with whatever they have left, and hold out against the long winter to come.

But General Power might disagree.

FAQs

Q1. Does Starvation check every hex on the board? And who decides where the units flee to, following the rules?

A1. The current player checks and resolves starvation for the entire board.

Q2. Where do I put radiation when it enters a

Dead hex during Doomsday?

A2. The current player picks a hex closest (by counting hexes) to the place where radiation would have otherwise entered the map. In this way, radiation will spread or a **Dead** hex will occur every turn.

Q3. What happens to refugees and stockpiles in dead hexes?

A3. Refugees will move to the nearest radiated hex in hope that a kind soul will rescue them. Stockpiles are removed.

CREDITS

by Erin Escobedo

SPECIAL THANKS

to Amabel Holland, for taking a risk on an unknown

to Magdalena Escobedo, for everything

Playtesters: Robb Clark, Aaron Moore, Donald Rule, Tim Coles, Alice Connor, Josh Fulton,

George Breden, Greg Janson

Development & Editing: Christopher Paul High

Cover & Map: Amelia Sales



Capstone
Games

Licensed to Capstone Games; artwork & related works ©2025
2 Techview Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45215
capstone-games.com