Phases

- Phase 1: Establishment
- Phase 2: Growth
- Phase 3: Crisis
- Phase 4: Resolution

Phase 1: Establishment

Duration: Until the first Queen of any suit is drawn

Tone: Hopeful, ambitious, foundational

Focus: The settlement is finding its footing. Players define community identity, establish resources, set up infrastructure, and articulate initial aspirations. Challenges exist but feel manageable. The future seems open.

Mechanical Notes:

- Characters emerge slowly; typically 2-4 by phase end
- Tension starts low and builds gradually
- Projects initiated tend to be infrastructural
- Deliberate actions often define cultural identity

Phase Ends: When any Queen appears, read that suit's Growth Phase entry below, then transition to Phase 2.

Phase 2: Growth

Duration: From first Queen until first King

Tone: Expansive, confident, ambitious

Focus: The settlement thrives. Projects advance, population grows, relationships with neighbors develop. There's momentum and optimism, but also growing complexity. Success brings new challenges—managing abundance, dealing with growth pains, exploring beyond safe boundaries.

Mechanical Notes:

- More characters emerge; settlement feels populated
- Projects become more ambitious
- Challenges test systems but feel surmountable
- External relationships (other settlements, exploration) become prominent

Queen Effects (when first drawn):

- **Queen of Hearts** — A celebration or cultural triumph; community bonds strengthen
- **Queen of Diamonds** — Resource abundance or technological breakthrough; new capacity unlocked
- **Queen of Spades** — Deeper understanding of Duskara emerges; adaptation accelerates
- **Queen of Clubs** — A mystery revealed or transformation embraced; the settlement evolves

Phase Ends: When any King appears, read that suit's Crisis Phase entry below, then transition to Phase 3.

Phase 3: Crisis

Duration: From first King until Resolution deck exhausts (or alternate end conditions)

Tone: Tested, strained, consequential

Focus: The settlement faces existential challenges. Growth has created vulnerabilities; success has attracted attention or exhausted reserves. Core questions about identity, sustainability, and survival demand answers. Not all challenges can be solved—some require difficult choices and sacrifice.

Mechanical Notes:

- Tension rises faster
- Characters face hard decisions
- Projects may fail or succeed at great cost
- Deliberate actions tackle fundamental dilemmas
- The settlement's long-term viability is genuinely uncertain

King Effects (when first drawn):

- **King of Hearts** — Community fractures or someone important leaves; internal crisis
- **King of Diamonds** — Critical resource failure or technological breakdown; infrastructure crisis
- **King of Spades** — Environmental catastrophe or dangerous native phenomenon; Duskara strikes back
- **King of Clubs** — A terrible truth revealed or irreversible change occurs; transformation crisis

Design Note on Crisis: This isn't about punishing the players. It's about creating stakes that matter. The settlement may emerge stronger, transformed, or fractured—all are valid outcomes. The key is that choices during Crisis define who the community becomes.

Phase Ends: When the Resolution deck exhausts, or the settlement collapses (15 Tension), or the table unanimously agrees the story is complete.

Phase 4: Resolution

Duration: Final few cards of the deck (typically last 3-5 turns)

Tone: Reflective, conclusive, weighted with accumulated history

Focus: The settlement's fate crystallizes. Earlier choices bear fruit or haunt decisions. Questions receive answers, though not always the ones hoped for. The community's character—what it built, what it sacrificed, what it became—is revealed through how it handles these final challenges.

Mechanical Notes:

- Final actions carry extra weight
- Unresolved questions demand attention
- Characters make defining choices
- The settlement's ultimate fate becomes clear

This phase often happens naturally as the deck runs low, so it doesn't require a separate trigger. Players feel it: the story is concluding. Lean into it. Make final turns meaningful.