

EMPIRES WANT TO EXPAND

IMPERIAL SETTLERS

BARBARIANS VERSUS JAPANESE



The happy farmer with an happy dog that are walking out of their village, printed on the box, seem to introduce the players to another "Agricola like" game based on seeding, harvesting and growing the family. But this is a wrong feeling, as IMPERIAL SETTLERS puts you at the head of an Ancient nation (Romans, Barbarians, Egyptians and Japanese) trying to develop your Country as quick as possible while raiding the opponents to slow down their own increase and take some extra resources from their reserves. It is mainly a CARD GAME where the "combos" are very important for the final victory, and where each Nation has a different set of cards and, therefore, a different way to handle the game.

The box is even too large for the materials offered: four 30 cards "Faction decks" (one deck per Nation), one 84 cards "common deck", a small 16 cards deck for the "solo" games, 4 mini-boards (64x263 mm) for the players, one Victory Points (VP) board, 120 wooden tokens (30 each of Wood, Food, Stone and Workers) and a mix of cardboard

markers (gold coins, swords, shields, etc.). All the materials are good and their use is easy: my only "minor" remark goes to the wooden tokens, a little bit too small for my big fingers!

SIVIS PACEM PARA BELLUM

Ancient Romans particularly liked those words ("if you wish peace be ready for war") and they did not used much diplomacy: if the "opponent" was not keen to quickly submit to them they simply invaded his Country, completely destroyed one city and then asked for a new diplomatic meeting, were conditions were, of course, worse than before. And this is more or less what the players have to do in IMPERIAL SETTLERS: increase their "powers" first, with the right resources, and then expand their dominions while menacing raids against the other nations. All that is done with cards.

At the game start every player mix his own deck of 30 faction cards and then takes 2 of them in hand, adding another 2 cards from the "common" deck. During the game all the

cards will be placed in three rows on both sides of the personal board: the right side is for the "common" cards, while the left is for the "faction" ones. Right side cards may be raided by the other players, while the left side is safe from attacks (for all but the Japanese player).

(see picture 1)

On the personal board is also printed the normal "basic" production of that Nation: a mix of workers, swords, food, stones, wood and coins. Those "basic" resources are different for each nation and every player may save from turn to turn only one of them, discarding everything else that was not used: the Romans, for example, may store "swords", the Egyptians "money", the Barbarians "workers" and the Japanese "food". The boards have three different rows, as we already noted: the first is for production cards (either "common" on the right or "faction" on the left), the second for "special" cards and the third for "action" cards.

More resources will be available in the following turns if you add to your empire "production cards", if you makes "contracts" or if you use a combo of other cards: it is also possible to get resources paying 2 workers for each of them. In general resources are used to play new cards from your hand: each card has in fact a "cost" printed on the top left corner, and players must spend the printed resources in order to add the card to



Bild 1 - picture 1

their personal board. Cards also have a central drawing, showing the building and its name, a "color" (from gold to black for a total of 8 different shades) and one of the three effects (production, special and action) for which they will be used once placed on the table. On the very bottom side there is also the icon of one resource that is activated only if the card is used as a "contract" (see below).

The game is 5 turns long and each turn is divided in 4 phases:

- Exploration
- Production
- Actions
- End of turn phase

During the "exploration phase" a number of "common" cards equal to the number of players is turned on the table: starting with the First player, everybody select a card and add it to his hand. Then the same number of common cards is shown again and selected as before, but starting from the Last player. Finally everybody takes the first card of his "faction" deck. This is an important phase of the game, not only because you get three

new cards, but because you have to plan the turn according to what you have in hand and what you may get from the new distribution. Sometimes the players will not be able to get the right cards (as you know cards and lady Luck "travel" always hand to hand) and therefore they should be prepared to adopt very flexible tactics. When you find that your hand is not so flexible avoid to play all the available cards in the same turn and keep at least one of them in your hand. If the following card distribution will be OK you may play that card together with some new ones, but if you are still unable to get a good hand you have at least one card available. And even if you get disappointing cards do not surrender or be discouraged: there are always a few tricks to refill your hand (using special actions) and even the "bad" cards may become very helpful later in the game.

During the "production phase" every player takes from the bank the basic resources of his nation (the ones printed on the personal board) and adds all the resources gained with the "production" cards played on the

previous turns. If a player already has "contracts" under his board he also takes those resources (see below).

Pietro Cremona

A fine game to simulate expanding an Empire and raiding the opponents, with a bit of chance and demanding flexible tactics.

The "action phase" is of course the heart of the game and it is played in a series of consecutive rounds until all pass. The players, in turn, select ONE action per round:

a - build a location, taking a card from their hand, placing it on one side of the personal board and paying the cost with the available resources (note that gold coins are considered jokers and may be used in place of one or more resources at player's choice). Every location belongs to one of the following categories: "production", "special" and "action" and should be placed on the corresponding row, either on the right side of the board (common cards) or on the left side (faction ones). Most of the faction cards have an small "house" printed near the cost.



This means that to build that location the player must first discard another location from his board, either "raided" or not. Some cards also give you a "bonus" when you build them that you take immediately.

b - sign a contract simply means that player takes one Faction card from their hand, pay 1 food and place it upside down UNDER their personal board. The card shows only the resource depicted on its bottom which becomes a new "basic" one from now on. Furthermore the player immediately receive 1 resource of that kind.

c - make a raid, attacking a "common" location of one opponent. The player discards 2 sword markers and takes the resources of that card from the bank. Than the raided card is turned on the back side. If the card to attack has a defense marker (a shield) the player must use 3 swords (a very difficult task for all the nations ... but the Romans). The raided player receive 1 wood as a partial compensation. It is also possible to raid one of your own cards: the cost is just 1 sword: the card is simply discarded from your hand and you take all the resources printed on it.

d - use a location: this means that the player may pay the requested number of workers or resources in order to gain a benefit (VP, extra resources, extra cards, etc.). Often the quantity of the bonus or VP depends on the number of cards of a particular color already played on the personal board.

e - get resources_with workers: the player may discard 2 workers to get 1 resource or 1 card (either from the common or the faction decks)

When all the players pass the "end of the turn phase" arrives and all the remaining unused resources are discarded (with the exclusion of the type allowed by each Nation). Then everybody gets a new set of "basic" resources and the First player marker is passed to the following player (in clockwise order).

After the FIFTH turn the game is over and all the players add 1 VP for every "non raided" common card still active on the right of their personal board and 2 VP for every faction card exposed on the left to the VP acquired during the game. The player with most VP is the winner.

MEMENTO AUDERE SEMPER

Right! In effect Imperial Settler is a game where you need aggressive tactics, without losing too much time in programming a long term strategy: bad luck with the cards and enemy raids may stop your plans and if you do not have alternatives ... you will lose. It is an asymmetric game as all factions, at least initially, have different tactics, based on the resources that they get at the beginning of the turn and the "special" ones that they may store.

The very first game is usually employed to understand the mechanics and the possible "combos": for example "Take 1 coin for every "yellow" card already on your personal boards"; "Spend 1 resource "X" to get "Y" VP - you may use this card twice per turn"; "get 1 VP every time that you make a raid"; and so on.

Comments after the first game are really amazing as every "loser" say that the winner nation is stronger than the others for a lot of reasons: after more than a dozen games I have to say that I did not find a "game killing" faction. It is simply a question of using each nation in a different way, according to its strong points: for that reason the learning curve is a little bit longer than in other card games and you need to play at least 2-3 times each faction before being able to master it.

Romans, for example, may store swords from turn to turn so initially they should try to get some production card that offer extra swords in order to constantly menace the other players of raids. Then, in the middle or end game, they may use their swords to raid the opponents and get extra resources while reducing their VP total.

Egyptians will store coins, and therefore they initially need extra contracts with money in order to have a huge reserve to use later as joker in place of any necessary resources or to get VP from special cards.

Barbarians always have a lot of workers available in each turn and they may also store them from turn to turn: therefore they may use workers to get other resources or extra cards.

Japanese are a little bit different from the other nations as their faction cards may be raided: therefore they have to be protected by ... Samurai (workers placed on top of the cards). But they have a handful of interesting special cards to compensate for this annoying problem. They also may get and store "food" from turn to turn, so it will be easier for them to add strategic contracts to their personal board.

The interaction between players is not continuous, but it is important. At the start of every turn, for example, there is a selection of cards and one player may purposely take a card that could be much more important for an opponent. Raiding cards is also a constant menace: you have one shield each turn to protect ONE of your common locations, but all the other cards are at risk of being destroyed.

Finally I would like to mention the "Solo Option": yes, you may play the game solitary, selecting any faction and trying to have more location cards than a "Virtual Opponent". Special rules will allow this virtual opponent to attack you using a small deck of 16 specially designed cards.

All the drawings on cards and rulebook are very appealing: they have a "cartoon" style and they were the main reason for which I accepted to play the game the first time. Then I was hooked and I played every faction at least 3-4 times just to see which one was the best ... but I was unable to find a sure answer.

Despite the "cartoon" drawings this is not a game for families, children or newbie's: I recommend it to regular players but I am sure that also the expert ones will find it of interest and could play it sometimes.

Please note that there is already an expansion deck named "EMPIRE PACK 1: WHY CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS ?" You will find 10 new "faction" cards for each nation, 13 new "commons cards" and 2 extra "Battle Cards" for the solo play. The rules introduce a sort of "cooperation" between players using "open production" actions, while new cards with special effects are available for those that had not enough of the original "combos". If you wish more variety, especially after 8-10 standard games, you will surely like this expansion.

At the moment of this writing I was informed about a new expansion with an extra Nation: "Atlanteans", but I did not see it yet, so I cannot comment on it. ☑

Pietro Cremona

INFORMATION

Designer: Ignacy Trzewiczek
 Artist: Tomasz Jedruszek + Team
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 Publisher: Pegasus Spiele 2015
 www.pegasus.de

PLAYERS: 1-4
 AGE: 12+
 TIME: 90+

EVALUATION

Cards, resources management
 Users: With friends
 Version: de
 Rules: cz de en fr it nl pl
 In-game text: yes

Comments:
 Playing time depends on the number and experience of players * Good components
 * Needs flexible tactics instead of long-term strategies * Not a family game

Compares to:
 Civilization for the basic idea, asymmetrical card games

Other editions:
 Edge Entertainment, Pendragon Game Studio, Portal Games, REXhry, White Goblin Games, more are announced

My rating: ★★★★★

