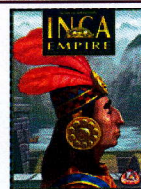


APUS IN TAHUANTINSUYU

# INCA EMPIRE

*Evolving Empire in South America*



INCA EMPIRE, by Alan Ernstein, was published in 2010 by White Goblin Games / Huch / Z-Man Games and describes the expansion of the ancient Inca population (in an area that covered parts of the actual Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Ecuador nations) between 1438 and 1533; then the Spanish army of Pizarro landed in the area and this was the end of the Inca Empire. The land, called Tahuantinsuyu, was ruled by the "Sapa Inca", a divine emperor that had all the powers, but the local administration was divided in four regions (Suyus) and entrusted to four governors (called "Apu"). This game was initially published in 2004 by Hangman Games (under the name of Tahuantinsuyu) but the Z-Man version has been much improved graphically.

The players have the role of those Apu: the game can be played with three or four "Apu" and for that reason the game board has two sides. Side 1 shows the empire with 3 "colored" starting regions and 36 standard regions, while side 2 shows the same empire with 4 starting regions and 42 standard regions. Many small paths cross those re-

gions and connect villages, fortifications and towns. All around the "map" there is a track to mark the player's Victory Points (VP).

The other components are: 32 "Sun" cards, 1 small "Sun events" board, 240 small colored wooden sticks = roads (60 for each player), 4 colored Inca figures (one per player, used to mark the VP), counters for fortifications, towns and terraces, yellow wooden cubes for "temples", 45 "Culture" markers, 73 "Worker" tokens (that are the "money" of the game) and 4 cost-summary cards.

The game is played in 7 rounds, each divided in a variable number of phases. At the end of the 10th phase of the 7th round the game stops and the player with most points wins (no ties are possible, as we will see later). A turn record chart is printed on the map to help the players to follow the right phases during the game.

Before starting the "Culture" markers are positioned on the map (with their "neutral" back visible) one per region (also called Suyus): they symbolize the local inhabitants and their "wealth". Each counter shows 3 information: the "cost" (in workers) to conquer

the region in which they are positioned, the VP that they immediately grant to the "conqueror" and the number of workers (slaves?) that they offer to the Apu for the following rounds. At the beginning of the game each player receives a summary card (same color of their starting region), 60 sticks and 3 Sun cards. All the Inca figures are positioned on space "0" on the VP track.

Each round starts with an "Inca Phase" where each player takes a certain number of "workers": some are offered by the Sapa Inca himself (four on round 1, three on rounds 2-4, one on rounds 5-6 and none on round 7), other are taken by the players who collected "culture" markers and/or terraces, and a few are "donated" by the strongest players to the feeble ones.

Then a certain number of "Sun phase" and "People phase" will follow (2+2 on rounds 2-4; 3+3 on rounds 5-6 and 4+4 on round 7), and each round is closed by a Sapa Inca phase. Only round 1 is different, as it counts only 1 Inca phase, 2 "People" phases and the final Sapa Inca phase: this because players need to consolidate their "Suyus" first, con-



quering some adjacent regions and collecting precious "culture" markers.

In each "Sun" phase players calculate the new "turn order" (the player in last position on the VP track is the first to play, and so on) and then they play their Sun cards: each player chooses one card and puts it (covered) on the Sun Event Board (and picks up a card from the deck to maintain a hand of 3 cards). Then all cards are revealed and their effect is applied: note that the Sun Event board is divided in 4 sectors (4 player game) and each sector only affects two adjacent colors. For example, a card in sector 1 affects the Blue and Brown players, in sector 4 it affects players Green and Orange, etc.

Each Sun card describes an event which produce positive or negative effects: you may build an extra road or ... one road less; you may conquer a region paying a soldier less ... or 1 or 2 soldiers more; you may erect a building extra or ... pay extra workers to build it; you may gain extra workers; etc. (After the first "test" game it is very easy to understand what the icons on the cards means and you do not need to go back to the rule book to read the explanations). The effect of those cards is very important for the game: in each following Sun Phase the players add a new card to each sector, and the effects are summed to the preceding ones.

#### Pietro Cremona

*Inca Empire is a very well-made game with standard mechanisms and lots of options that keep you busy during the game.*

For that reason sometimes it is better to play a feeble card on our own sector to avoid a much worse card ... graciously given by an opponent.

Each Sun phase is followed by a People phase: this is the heart of the game, as you have the opportunity to build TWO ROADS per phase (unless modified by the Sun cards) AND ONE BUILDING. The roads are free of charge (again, Sun cards may change this) but the building have a cost in "workers": a Town cost 6 workers, a Garrison 4, a Temple 5 (but may be erected only on already built cities or garrisons) and a Terrace 2. In exchange for this financial effort each building rewards you with Victory Points: each Town gives immediately 4 VP to the builder and 3 "permanent" VP (in the Sapa Inca phase) to each player that has a road connected to it; the Garrison gives 3VP to the builder (and 2 permanent VP), the Temple 4/1 VP and the Terrace 1/1 VP. Each Terrace also gives to the owner an extra "worker" in the Inca phase. Instead of building the player may CONQUER a region that is adjacent to one of his roads: conquering means "paying" to the bank a number of workers equal to the value printed on the "culture" marker. Then the marker is

added to the player's properties and may immediately grant him a certain number of VP (from "0" to "4"): in each subsequent Inca phase each marker may also give to its owner some extra workers (from "0" to "4"). It is VERY important to start the game conquering "culture" markers that may grant to your Apu the maximum of extra workers with the minimum cost (remember: to conquer a region you must spend a certain number of workers and those are very scarce at the start), as you will need later a lot of them to gain VP with the buildings.

Each player starts his road network from his original "colored" region and may progress into new areas discovering "culture" markers (each counter adjacent to a conquered region must be turned face up) conquering extra regions, building more roads, and so on. At the beginning of the game everything is easy and the process is carried on very quickly, but as the game proceed you have to make a lot of choices: you may still erect new building to gain the extra VP for the construction, but you may also decide to let the other pay the buildings and then connect them to your road network. It is also important to note that each new road must touch one existing road of your network and you cannot build new roads if the regions that you cross are still unconquered, thus the right sequence of your progression should always be conquer and build roads.

After the first 2-3 rounds the game becomes more tactical as you have to consider many alternatives and decide how to play to get your maximum benefit: try to have many conquests and build long roads towards the extreme boards of the empire (so you will accumulate a lot of "culture" markers that will help you towards the end of the game to build with immediate high profit while the competitors are too far away to connect their roads to your buildings) or stay close to the other players, expanding slowly your area but connecting your roads to every new building.

The best option is, of course, a mix of the above: in the first rounds it is really interesting to accumulate "culture" markers, especially those that grant 2-3 workers per Inca phase, but then it is very profitable to connect your roads to the existing building before being cut off. Yes, because we have to note that each "path" on the map may be covered by ONLY ONE road (colored stick). Hopefully there are also 4 Sun cards (Wilderness road) which allow you to put a second road aside the first or to create a special path on the map, but it is not "granted" that you may find and use them, so you cannot wait too long. Also remember that it is impossible to win the game without the "immediate" VP granted by new buildings, so you really have to make some long term plans.

Each Round is closed by a "Sapa Inca" phase: all the Sun cards are now discarded from the board, then the players must calculate the "permanent" VP gained with the buildings connected to their roads (adjusting their markers on the VP track) and finally everybody must discard eventual unused workers (you may keep in your hand a number of workers equal to the "free" workers given by the Inca).

As you see there is nothing really innovative in this game: but the mix that Alan Ernstein designed is very nice and we liked the game a lot. We tested Inca Empire in both versions (3 and 4 players) and the result was very similar: a couple of hours of intense and satisfactory gaming. It is also very difficult to create a "Kingmaker" situation (where a player may decide who will win with his help) because it is difficult to create effective "nasty" attacks (remember that the Sun Cards always affect TWO adjacent players and none of those cards may completely destroy a strategy). As the number of "options" increases with the expansions of the Suyus the game begins to become more and more difficult to manage so I cannot suggest "Inca Empire" to families or inexperienced players, unless they are all new to this game. But it will prove very interesting and addictive to expert players.

Pietro Cremona

## INCA EMPIRE

**Designer:** Alan D. Ernstein

**Artist:** Alexandre Roche

**Title de:** ident

**Price:** ca. 45 Euro

**Publisher:** White Goblin Games 2010

[www.whitegoblingames.nl](http://www.whitegoblingames.nl)

## EVALUATION

Resources Management  
For experts  
Version: multi  
Rules: de en fr nl  
In-game use of language: yes

### Comments:

Very nice components  
Two-sided board  
Some gaming experience necessary  
Several possible strategies for winning

### Compares to:

All games with resources management to acquire regions and victory points

### My rating:



PLAYERS:  
3-4

AGE:  
12+

TIME:  
120+



(2010) 7,39 / 569 / 386