

Merchants of Empire

Régis Bonnessée
regis.bonnessee@wanadoo.fr
Daniel U. Thibault
D.U.Thibault@Bigfoot.com

By Régis Bonnessée,
Translated by Daniel U. Thibault
A Game of Strategy for 2 to 4 players, 14 years and older

Components

- ◆ 1 map board
- ◆ 4 player screens
- ◆ 4 "Caravan" markers
- ◆ 20 "Temple" markers (5 of each colour)
- ◆ 80 "Elector" markers (20 of each colour)
- ◆ 60 Resource markers in 5 colours (18 black, 15 brown, 12 grey, 9 green and 6 yellow)
- ◆ 20 "Monopoly" cards
- ◆ 38 "Contract" cards (7 x "2", 6 x "3", 5 x "4" and 4 each of "5" through "9")
- ◆ 24 "Action" markers
- ◆ 1 marker each for "Resources", "Contracts" and "Turn" (not supplied)
- ◆ 1 one-minute timer (not supplied)
- ◆ 1 twenty-sided die (not supplied)
- ◆ 2 draw string bags (not supplied)
- ◆ this rule book

Context

Legend has it that, millennia ago, the all-powerful god Phaos raised a vast continent from the primeval waters and had gifted it to his worshippers. On these lands arose the Imperium, a prosperous kingdom whose influence grew with the centuries. Wealth abounds and the merchants soon realised the key to power resided in the control and trade of that wealth.

Object of the Game

Each player is a rich merchant of the empire who seeks to extend his religious, political and economic influence over the kingdom. Neither of the three spheres of endeavour must be neglected to win the great game - the stakes are nothing less than the favour of the Emperor.



The Map Board

The map shows twenty cities (numbered 1 through 20) of varying ranks (1 through 3) plus the capital (the rank 3 city with no number). The cities supply resources, offer contracts and can have Temples built in them. The map also shows the eight regions (I through VIII) where the players will place their Electors, as well as the roads linking the cities. Each road is labelled (a, b, c or d) to facilitate planning the moves of each player's caravan. Lastly, there are three tracks: the Turn Track on the left (running for 12 turns) and the Supply Tracks on the right (Resources track and Contracts track).



Turn, Resources and Contracts markers



A screen



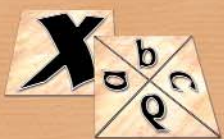
Caravan markers



Temple markers



Elector markers



Action marker



Resource markers



A contract



Game Length

The game normally lasts 12 turns (9 turns for a short game). This should take about an hour (45 minutes for a short game).

Setting Up

- ♦ Place the Turn marker immediately below the "1" space of the Turn Track. Place the Resources and Contracts markers on the resource and contract icons of the Supply Tracks.
- ♦ Put the Contracts in an opaque bag and mix them up.
- ♦ Put the Resource markers in another opaque bag and mix them up.
- ♦ Each player picks a colour and the following bits of that colour (except for the Action markers, which are all the same):
 - 1 Screen (previously assembled)
 - 20 Elector markers
 - 1 Caravan marker
 - 6 Action markers
 - 5 Temple markers
- ♦ **Place the initial Resources and Contracts as follows:** Draw 4 Resource markers from the bag and place them on the capital. Draw 4 more Resource markers and roll the twenty-sided die to designate which city to place them on. Repeat three more times (so that the capital plus four cities have resources on them). Draw a Contract marker and roll the twenty-sided die to designate which city to place it on. Repeat four more times (so that five cities have a contract on them). If the city designated by the die roll already has resources or a contract on it, the marker(s) is (are) placed on the next empty city instead. Thus, once set up is completed, the capital and four cities will have four resources on them, and five more cities will have a single contract on them. *For example, if the die for a contract indicates a 19 and that city already has resources on it, the contract is placed on the next empty city. If city 20 has a contract on it, the contract goes on city 1 instead, and so on.*
- ♦ **Place the player Caravans as follows:** Each player rolls the die, and the high roller picks a city (other than the capital) to start on. The chosen city may be empty or not; it does not matter. Proceeding clockwise from that player, each remaining player picks a different city to start on (always excluding the capital). No two players may start in the same city.

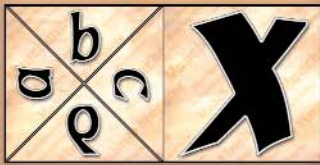


Figure 1
The Action markers are two-sided

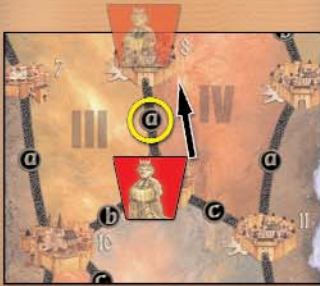


Figure 2
To move to city 8, the player plots "Move A".



Figure 3
The Resources
1 - Coal
2 - Bronze
3 - Silver
4 - Gems
5 - Gold

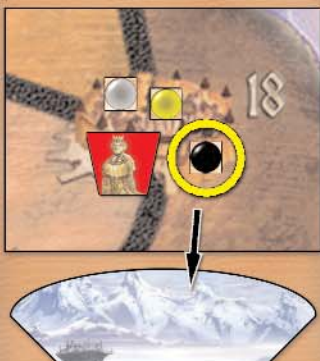


Figure 4
The player must collect the Coal, the least of the three resources present.

The Turn Sequence

A game turn is broken down into five phases:

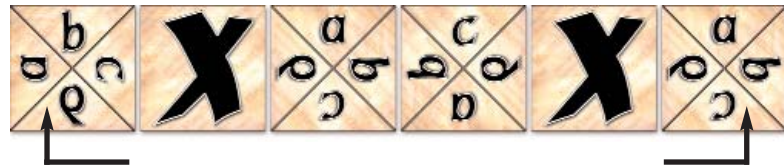
- ♦ Phase I: Advance the Turn Marker.
- ♦ Phase II: Action Plotting for the Turn.
- ♦ Phase III: Action Resolution.
- ♦ Phase IV: Supply.
- ♦ Phase V: Monopoly Scoring (turns 3, 6, 9 and 12 only).

Phase I: Advance the Turn Marker

At the game's outset, the Turn marker should be immediately below the "1" on the Turn Track. At the beginning of each turn, the Turn marker advances to the next space on the Turn Track. Turns 3, 6, 9 and 12 are marked with an "m" to indicate that there is a Monopoly phase on those turns only. The game ends with turn 12 (turn 9 when playing a short game). The player who went first on the preceding turn (or who placed his Caravan first during set up) goes last on this turn. That is to say, the "first player" title moves one seat clockwise at the beginning of each turn.

Phase II: Action Plotting for the Turn

Using their Action markers, the players simultaneously and secretly plot their actions for this turn. Each player may plot up to six Actions using his six markers. The Action markers (see Figure 1) are placed right behind the screen from left to right. The leftmost marker will be resolved first, progressing to the right.



This plot represents Move B; Transact; Move A; Move C; Transact; Move A.

The Action markers are two-sided. On the front of each marker is an "X"; this is used to indicate the player is Transacting in the city. On the back of each marker are the letters "a" through "d"; this is used to indicate the player's caravan is moving. The players have one minute to plot their actions for the turn. The "first player" turns the timer over to start the phase. Once the time is elapsed, the player screens are shifted back so as to reveal each player's plotted actions. The players are not allowed to change their plot once the time has elapsed.

Movement

A player may move his caravan from its current city to an adjacent city by following a connecting road. Each road is marked by a letter (a, b, c or d). To plot his move, the player indicates which road he is taking by rotating the Action marker so the appropriate letter is on top (see the illustration above and Figure 2).

Transactions

A player may transact ("X") when his caravan is on a city with a resource or a contract.

- ♦ **Collect a Resource:** There are five different resources (see Figure 3). In order of increasing worth, they are: coal (1), bronze (2), silver (3), gems (4) and gold (5). See Figure 3. A player may collect only one resource per city during his turn, and the collected resource is always the one of least worth (see Figure 4). Of course, the player may collect several resources by visiting several cities during his turn.



Figure 1

The Resources marker (right) moves whenever a city is emptied of its resources. The Contracts marker (left) likewise moves whenever a contract is fulfilled.

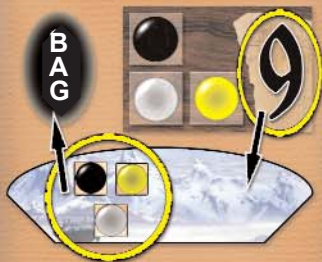


Figure 2
Fulfill a Contract



rank 1
city



rank 2
city



rank 3
city

Figure 3

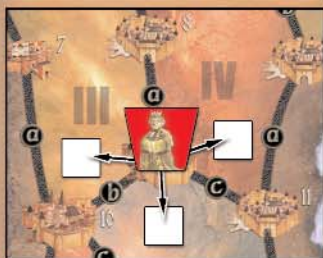


Figure 4

A rank 3 city allows the (face down) placement of three Electors.

- ♦ **Fulfill a Contract:** A player fulfils a contract when he brings to the city the resources indicated by the contract. For example, the Figure 2 contract (worth 9) calls for Coal, Silver and Gold. Once the contract is fulfilled, the resources brought by the player are returned to the bag.

Phase III: Action Resolution

Sequence of Resolution

Once Phase II is over and the Action plots are revealed, the players resolve their first action, starting with the "first player" and going clockwise. Then the players resolve their second action, and so on until all actions are resolved.

Moves

If a player's movement Action is invalid (e.g. the player plotted a move along road "d" but there is no such road leading out of his current city), that action is ignored and play continues normally. Nothing prevents several caravans from occupying the same city.

Transactions

If a player's transaction Action is invalid (e.g. the player plotted to fulfil a contract but another player beat him to it), that action is ignored and play continues normally. Each player must weigh the risks of his plotted Actions, considering the positions of the other players.

- ♦ **Collect a Resource:** When a player collects a resource, he places it behind his screen (see Figure 4, preceding page). Should this Action empty the city of resources, the Resources marker advances one space on the Resources track (see Figure 1).
- ♦ **Fulfill a Contract:** When a player fulfils a contract, the Contracts marker advances one space on the Contracts track (see Figure 1). The player also gets to do any two of the following three things:
 1. Keep the contract;
 2. Build a Temple on the city; or
 3. Place Electors in the city's surrounding regions.

Keep the Contract

Each contract is worth a certain sum (the number showing on the scroll: see Figure 2). When the contract is "kept", the player amasses money and hence economic influence. If the contract is not "kept", it goes back into the Contracts bag.

Build a Temple

A player may build a Temple when he fulfils a contract. There can only be one Temple (of any colour) in any given city. This garners religious influence for the player — as many points as the city has rank (see Figure 3).

Place Electors

When a player fulfils a contract, he can place Electors in the regions surrounding the city — as many Electors as the city has rank. The Electors are placed face down in the regions adjacent to the city where the contract was fulfilled (see Figure 4). Electors garner political influence for the player if he manages to have the most Electors in one or more regions — one point per such region. Electors can be distributed amongst the regions surrounding a city as the player wishes. Once placed, they cannot be moved or examined.

Phase IV: Supply

The two Supply tracks (Resources and Contracts) indicate whether any new Resources or Contracts appear on the map during this phase.

Resources

For each space the Resources marker has moved on the Resources track, 4 resources must be drawn and deployed. If the capital is empty of resources, it receives the first set of resources drawn. The remaining sets are deployed randomly following the set up rules. Bring the Resources marker back to zero once this is done.

Contracts

For each space the Contracts marker has moved on the Contracts track, a contract must be drawn and deployed randomly, following the set up rules. Bring the Contracts marker back to zero once this is done.

Phase V: Monopoly Scoring (turns 3, 6, 9 and 12)

During this phase, the "first player" announces how much coal he has in stock. The remaining players do likewise, in sequence. The player with the most coal wins a Monopoly card (worth 3 economic influence), which he places behind his screen. If there is a tie, no Monopoly card is awarded. This process is repeated for the remaining four commodities.

NOTE: Each player may announce his actual stock or any lesser quantity. A player may not "bid" more than he actually holds. Any other player is entitled to be shown the claimed amount of Resources.

End of Game

At the end of the last turn, the final scores in the religious, political and economic spheres are determined.

Religious Influence

Each Temple built by a player scores the city's rank in religious influence.

Political Influence

The Electors that were placed during the game are flipped up. Each region is awarded to the player with the most Electors and is worth one point. If there is no plurality (i.e. several players tie for the most Electors), no political influence is awarded for that region.

Economic Influence

Each player scores the amount in Contracts he has kept and in Monopolies won.

Victory

The winner is determined through a process of elimination. Follow the instructions below until only one player is left in the running the winner. Using the following successive criteria, eliminate a first player:

- . The least religious influence;
- . The least largest Temple (e.g. three rank 1 Temples loses to a single rank 3 Temple);
- . The least total number of Temples.



Using the following criteria, eliminate a second player (eliminate two if the preceding step couldn't):

- . The least political influence;
- . The least largest region controlled (comparing the total numbers of Electors);
- . The least total number of Electors on the map.

Using the following criteria, eliminate a third player (eliminate three if the preceding steps couldn't):

- . The least economic influence;
- . The least number of Monopolies;
- . The least largest contract;
- . The least number of contracts;
- . The least quantity of gold left in stock;
- . The least quantity of gems left in stock;
- . The least quantity of silver left in stock;
- . The least quantity of bronze left in stock;
- . The least quantity of coal left in stock.

If there are still more than one player left at this point, either break the tie using the die or declare a shared victory.

If playing with more than four players (the game should accommodate five or six players rather easily), repeat the last set of criteria until only player is left.

Variants

Five- or Six-Player Game

Once you've scrounged up the additional set(s) of player pieces, the only change is during set up. Instead of placing five sets of resources and five contracts on the map, you place six of each.

No Secrets Variant

In this variant, the Electors are played face up on the board, and the players do not use their screens: everything is visible at all times.

