

Empire: TCG — Rules Explainer

Rules are up to date as of November 2024 but may change in the future.

Introduction

Empire is a 2-player card game, in which both players are fighting for control of three territories, and ultimately trying to overwhelm the opposing forces and reduce their opponent's Morale to 0.

Setup

Players start the game with 25 Morale. If you are reduced to 0 Morale, you have lost the game.

Players start the game with an Army Deck with 30 cards and a Civic Deck with 15 cards.

Each player shuffles both of their decks separately and draws 4 Army cards and 3 Civic cards for their opening hand.

Each player may Mulligan cards from their opening hand. Do this by putting aside any number of cards from your hand, then drawing that many cards from their respective decks before shuffling the cards put aside back into their decks. Each player may do this once.

Players randomly determine who starts the game with the Initiative. That player is given the Initiative Tracker, and the game begins with the Strategy Phase of round 1.

Initiative

Rather than players taking turns, the game of Empire runs on Initiative.

Each time a player takes an action, such as playing a villager, deploying an Army card, or committing their forces, initiative passes to the other player, and they may take an action, initiative moving back and forth each time.

If a player cannot or does not wish to take an action, they may pass. When a player passes, initiative returns to their opponent, who may take an action or pass. If they take an action, initiative passes back to the player who passed, who again has a chance to take an action.

Once both players have passed in a row without either taking another action, play moves on to the next phase.

Rounds and Phases

Each round of Empire consists of three phases - The Strategy Phase, the Battle Phase, and Replenishment.

In each phase except Replenishment, players take turns taking actions or passing the initiative, until both players have passed the initiative. Then play moves to the next phase.

Once play has moved to Replenishment and the steps there have been resolved, play continues with a new round, until one player has won, and the game is over.

Strategy Phase

During the Strategy Phase, players may take the following actions. You may take actions any number of times and in any order unless otherwise specified:

Deploy an Army Card: To deploy an Army card, a player pays the costs and plays the card from their hand.

Play a villager (once per round): To play a villager, a player plays a Civic card from their hand into their Heartland. A player may only play a villager once each round.

Settle a territory (once per round): To settle a territory, a player plays a Civic card from their hand into a territory they are Occupying with a unit. A player may only settle once each round.

Activate an ability: If a player controls a unit with an ability which does not say Maneuver, a player may activate that ability during the strategy phase, paying any associated costs.

Commit your units (once per round): Once per Strategy Phase, a player may choose to commit their units. The player chooses which of their units to commit, then chooses where to commit them to. As part of the commit action, unexerted units in a Heartland may advance into a territory, and unexerted units in a territory may retreat to their Heartland. You do not need to advance all units into the same territory, but may advance any number of units into any number of territories you choose.

Once both players have passed without taking an action play moves on to the Battle Phase.

Battle Phase

The Battle Phase consists of two steps - Maneuvers and Combat.

During the Maneuver Step you may take the following actions.

Deploy an Army Card: This works the same as in the strategy phase. Note that only Battle Tactics and cards that explicitly allow it in their text can be deployed during the Battle Phase.

Activate Abilities: You may activate any of your units' abilities during the Battle Phase, including Maneuvers. Maneuvers can only be activated once per round.

Once both players have passed without taking an action, you move to Combat.

Combat

Combat happens separately in each of the three territories. In each of the territories each player assigns damage to the enemy units distributed as they choose. If a player occupying that territory deals any excess damage, they deal that damage to their opponent's Morale.

Combat happens simultaneously in each of the territories but you can resolve them one at a time for ease of play.

Then, play moves on to Replenishment.

Replenishment

When replenishment begins, the player with the Initiative Tracker does the following steps:

- Resolve all effects from cards they are fielding that have an effect at replenishment.
- Unexert their units and villagers.
- Draw either 1 Army card or 2 Civic cards, players choice.
- Finally, pass the Initiative Tracker to their opponent.

The opponent then follows the same steps but keeps the Initiative Tracker.

Damage is removed from units and effects that last until replenishment end before beginning a new round starting from the Strategy Phase.

Card Explainer

Army Cards

Your army deck consists of up to 4 different types of cards: Units, Tactics, Battle Tactics and Chronicles.

They have two numbers in the top left corner, one Arabic numeral and one roman numeral.

The roman numeral indicates the tier you are required to be in in order to deploy the card.

You begin the game in tier-I and each territory you have settled moves you up one tier, capping out at Tier-IV with all 3 territories settled.

The Arabic numeral indicates the card's mana cost. You primarily generate mana by exerting villagers, which you can only do as part of paying for a cost.

Iron Price: You may deploy cards one tier higher than you currently are by paying the tier as an additional mana cost. For example, *Nwembe, the Caretaker* (shown on the next page) usually requires you to be Tier-III and pay 2 mana to deploy. Using the Iron Price rule, you may instead deploy him in Tier-II by paying 5 mana.

Units and Unit Positions



Units are the bread and butter of Empire. When you deploy a unit, it enters exerted in your Heartland. Exerted units deal no damage, cannot commit and cannot activate Maneuvers.

In the bottom left corner of the card is the unit's Attack. This is the damage it deals in combat.

In the bottom right corner of the card is the unit's Defense. This is the amount of damage it can take before it dies. Units that die go to your graveyard. Damage a unit has taken resets at replenishment.

Units will often have special abilities, for example Nwembe, the Caretaker has the ability “*Sentinel — Whenever Nwembe advances into a territory you have settled, draw an Army card and a Civic card*”.

Units can be in three different positions on the board:

1. In your heartland, where a unit is safe from combat.
2. *Advancing* into a territory, where the unit participates in combat.
3. Occupying a territory, where the unit participates in combat, enables you to settle the territory and lets you deal excess damage to your opponent through that territory.

When you use the commit action to commit a unit from your heartland, the unit moves into an advancing position in the territory of your choice. If the unit survives combat and is unopposed by enemy units, you may choose to have it occupy that territory after combat.

If you have multiple units in a territory after combat including the occupying one, you may choose whichever of those units to occupy the territory. The rest return to your Heartland.

Tactics and Battle Tactics



Tactics are single use effects that happen when you deploy the card. Once the effect has taken place, the tactic is put in your graveyard. Some tactics necessitate a target. These cannot be deployed unless a valid target exists. For instance, you cannot deploy Vow of Honour unless there is a solitary allied unit in play.

Unlike other Army cards, which can only be deployed during the Strategy Phase, Battle Tactics can be deployed both during the Strategy Phase and the Battle Phase.

Chronicles



Chronicles are cards with continuous effects. You must deploy chronicles into a territory you are occupying. Move the unit occupying the territory into an advancing position. Chronicles count as occupying the territory for the purposes of settling and dealing excess damage.

Each round, at the beginning of the Battle Phase, you escalate any chronicles you are fielding, putting a counter on them and triggering their escalation effect.

At replenishment, if one or more of your chronicles has escalation counters equal to or more than the culmination cost, trigger the culmination effect and put the chronicle into your Graveyard.

If, at the end of the Battle Phase, an opponent has surviving units in a territory where you have a chronicle, and you don't have any surviving units in that territory, they may choose one of their units to occupy the territory. If they do, your chronicle is destroyed and put in your graveyard.

Civic Cards



Your civic deck consists of two types of card: Villagers and Settlements.

You may play settlements as villagers, and you may settle territories with villagers.

Note that the abilities of these cards are only active when they are in their intended zone: Villagers only have abilities in their Heartland and settlements only have their abilities when they are used to settle territories.

Abilities on settlements that say “at replenishment” only trigger if you are occupying the territory they are placed in.

Playing Field Overview

Player 1's Heartland



Player 1's Villager Zone

Player 1's Unit Zone

Player 1
Unit in
their
Heartland

Player 1
Exerted Unit in
their Heartland

Territory 1 (Edge)

Player 2 Settlement

Territory 2 (Middle)

Territory 3 (Edge)

Player 1
Advancing
Unit

Player 2
Occupying
Unit

Player 2's Unit Zone



Player 2's Villager Zone



Player 2
Exerted Villagers

Player 2's Heartland