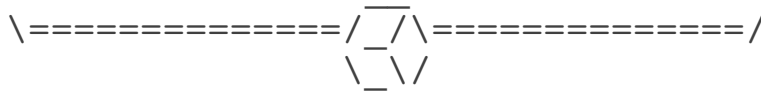




# Overview



*ASCII Empires is a board game in which 1–7 players lead early Mediterranean civilizations through antiquity by advancing science and culture, constructing buildings and interacting through trade or conquest. The game is named for its use of text-based visuals inspired by the 1967 ASCII character encoding standard.*

*The gameplay can be described as “roll-and-write”. Each civilization's progress in various fields and their production and use of resources are marked on a piece of paper, the Empire sheet. Each turn begins with rolling of five dice. During a brief round of diplomacy, some dice may be rerolled; the players then proceed to use the results to mark their sheets. When any of several possible game end conditions is triggered, the player with the most points wins.*

## Components

Besides these rules, you will need:

- One Empire sheet per player
- Pens or pencils
- 5 six-sided dice: 3 of one colour and 1 each of two different colours. The set referenced by the rulebook is 3 white, 1 green and 1 black dice, but any colours will do as long as the players can tell them apart.

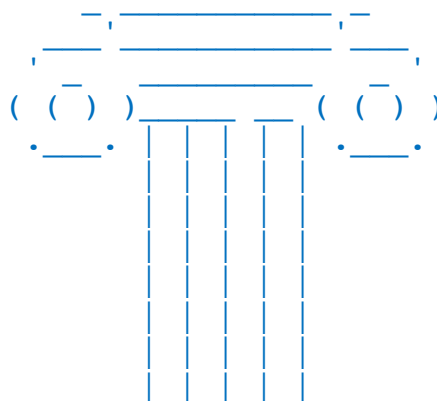
The rules and Empire sheets of ASCII Empires can be downloaded online: the game is “print-and-play”.

## Setup

Print an Empire sheet for each player. A4 size is recommended; if you plan to play several games, printing on both sides of the paper helps conserve trees. The sheets may be printed either in greyscale or in colour.

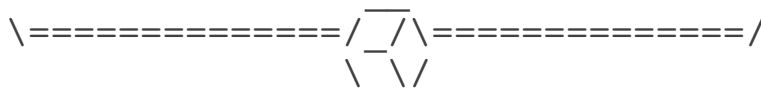
Players should sit around a table facing each other. The tablespace in the middle is considered **the Mediterranean Sea**. (The fact that the top side of each Empire’s map borders on water serves as a reminder.) In multiplayer games, the seating order dictates which Empires will be connected at the start of the game (see *Reach*, p. 7).

You may name your Empire and give it an Emblem (e.g. your initials or a small picture). The Emblems are used for flavour but also to distinguish different players’ Colonies (p. 8). You are then ready to start playing!





# Playing the Game



## Turn Structure

ASCII Empires is played in turns. With the exception of the solo mode (see p. 12), the number of turns is not set beforehand. Instead, the players take turns until one of several game end conditions (p. 10) is met.

Each turn consists of five phases:

1. **Dice:** The five dice are rolled. Any player may do this (as the results will be the same for all players).
2. **Diplomacy:** The players discuss the results and may collectively spend Gold to reroll some of the dice (p. 9).
3. **Disasters:** All dice still showing the value 1 are rerolled. This may result in Disasters being triggered (p. 10).
4. **Development:** This is where most of the game action takes place. The die faces are now considered final and the players take actions simultaneously using the die results available to them.
5. **Deployment:** Players may Deploy Armies to perform one or more military actions (p. 8).

The players then begin another turn if no game end conditions have been met. Otherwise, the scores will be calculated after the final Deployment phase and the player with the most points wins.

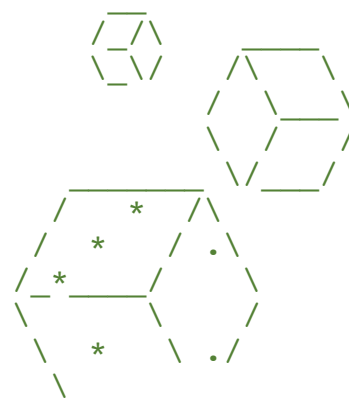
## Using Dice

In the Development phase, players use the dice to improve their Empires. Each die can be assigned to one of the following actions:

- Constructing buildings (p. 5)
- Activating one or more buildings
- For Trade (p. 9)
- For Culture (p. 9)

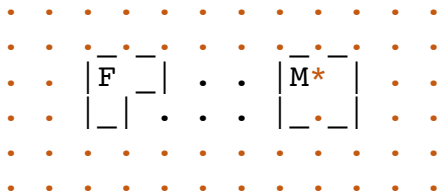
The following rules always apply:

- The actions may be taken in any order.
- Each action may be taken several times.
- Each individual die may only be used once per player per turn.
- Players' decisions are independent of one another. (Players may use the same dice for different purposes.)
- You may only use dice that are available to you based on your progress on the Science track (p. 7). At the beginning of the game, only white dice are available but the green and black die are still rolled for the purpose of checking for Disasters.



# Buildings

Construction is one of the main ways for the Empire to expand. **Buildings** are constructed by connecting dots on the map with lines. (A connection between two adjacent dots counts as one line.)



A (F)arm and a (M)ine take 8 lines each to complete. The Mine has to be built around an Ore deposit (\*).

The number of lines you may draw on a turn is equal to the combined value of dice used for construction + the number of your Workers ("/", see p. 6). Former Workers turned to Specialists/Soldiers or destroyed by disasters ("X") no longer provide this bonus. The bonus is added only once each turn.



*Example:* The 3 white dice display values 4, 5 and 6 and you have 2 Workers. If all three dice are used for construction, the total number of possible lines is 4+5+6+2 = 17. This is enough to construct two Farms, each of which takes 8 lines to complete. The remainder (17-16 = 1) is lost, because no buildings can be constructed with a single line.

Alternatively, you could construct a single farm using only the "6" result and the Worker bonus, sparing the "2" and "5" results for activating buildings, Trade or Culture.

There are **six different building types** (Table, p. 6) divided into three **Levels**.

- To construct a Level II building, you need to have at least one staffed building of each Level I type. Correspondingly, both Level II building types are a prerequisite for Level III buildings.

Some rules always apply when constructing:

- Any number of buildings can be constructed on a turn.
- A building has to be completed (its outline fully drawn) on a single turn. (You may not start constructing a building and finish it on a later turn.)
- Buildings may not touch or overlap, including with buildings destroyed by Fire (p. 10) or razed Colonies (p. 8).
- Buildings must be constructed in the orientation shown on the Empire sheet. (You cannot rotate them.)
- If any part of a building's outline would intersect Mountainous terrain, the construction costs one Gold.
- The Mine building type must be constructed around an Ore deposit ("\*"). These are mostly, but not exclusively, located in the Mountains.

A building may be **staffed** (with a letter inside) or empty.

- Once complete, a building may be immediately staffed by crossing one of your available workers ("/" thus becoming "X") and marking the letter (e.g. "F" for Farm) inside the building. The Worker is now considered to be a Specialist working in that building.
- You must staff buildings on the same turn they were constructed if able. (You cannot carry empty buildings and idle workers from one turn to the next).

Staffed buildings can be **activated** using a die. When activated, each building produces a distinct advantage (Table, p. 6).

- A single die may activate all of your buildings of the same type.
- A single die may only activate one type of building.
- A building may be activated more than once each turn.
- A building may be activated on the same turn it was built, provided it is staffed and a suitable die is still available.

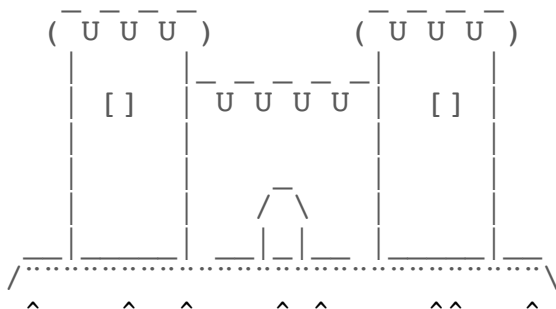
Level	Name	Lines to complete	When activated
I	(F)arm	8	A new Worker (“/”) is added to the population track
	(M)ine	8	A new Gold (“O”) is added to the Gold track
II	(S)chool	12	The leftmost box of the Science track (or any one of its two branches) is checked.
	(G)arrison	12	A Worker is crossed out, becoming a Soldier (the leftmost box of the Military track is checked)
III	(#) Colony	-	You may activate one of the affected opponent’s building types as if the buildings belonged to you. The opponent gains 1 Unhappiness.
	Palace	24	N/A (The palace is never activated, nor does it need a Specialist: it is where <i>you</i> live. You may only build one.)

To activate a building, the die must have a high enough value. Farms can be activated with any die equal to or greater than 2, while Mines can only be activated with a 5 or 6. The die values necessary to activate a building are shown in the table.

6	#	M	S	G	F
5		M	S	G	F
4			S	G	F
3				G	F
2					F

A “6” may activate a Colony or any other building type. A “3” can activate Garrisons or Farms, while a “2” may only activate Farms.

*Example:* You have two Schools and a Farm and access to dice showing the results 2, 4 and 5. You may use both 4 and 5 to activate the two Schools (for a total output of 4 Science) and the 2 to activate the Farm (to produce one Worker)



## Population

To grow, your Empire needs citizens. **Workers** are produced by **Farms** and recorded on a player’s **Population track** with slashes (“/”). You start with three Workers.

Workers are useful in several ways:

- More efficient construction. Once a turn, you may add the number of your Workers to the die results used to constructing buildings on the map (p. 5).
- Workers can become Specialists who staff buildings and enable them to be activated (p. 5).
- Workers may also be trained as Soldiers when activating Garrisons (p. 8).

Filling the entire Population track triggers the end of the game and provides a scoring bonus.

## Gold

**Gold** is a versatile resource. It is produced by **Mines** but can also be gained by advancing Trade, Science and Culture. Available Gold is recorded on the **Gold track** by filling the squares with circles (“O”). When spent, the circles are crossed over (“Ø”). You start with three Gold.

There are many uses for Gold:

- One Gold (“Ø”) allows a player to modify a die value by 1 in either direction for the purpose of construction, building activation, Trade or Culture. The same die can be modified several times by spending more Gold. The die is not turned to reflect the change – it retains its original value for the other players.
- Two Gold (“ØØ”) allows a player to hire a new Specialist without the need to check off a Worker. (The Specialist arrives from abroad.)
- Three Gold (“ØØØ”) allows the player to check one box of a Science, Culture or Military track (reflecting patronage of scientists or artists, or hiring mercenaries, respectively).

Moreover, Gold can be spent for rerolls in the Diplomacy phase (p. 9). Filling the entire Gold track triggers the end of the game and provides a scoring bonus.

## Science

Scientific progress gives your Empire access to additional dice, increasing your options and allowing more powerful turns.

Science is produced by **Schools**. Each time one of your Schools is activated, you may check the leftmost box of your Science track. At a certain point, the Science track branches into two; once past this point, you may check boxes in either one, or both, of the two branches.

- The upper branch reflects advances in human sciences and provides Culture which in turn can be used for valuable benefits.
- The lower branch reflects advances in natural and physical sciences and provides more immediate gains in the form of Gold and new abilities.

Several points on the Science track provide one-time or lasting benefits.

- Upon researching (checking the box of) Irrigation, you become immune to the Drought disaster.
- Upon researching Philosophy, you gain access to the Green die for the rest of the game.
- Upon researching Navigation, you gain access to the Green die (as with Philosophy) and also Reach (see next section) to all other players for the purposes of military actions or trade.
- Upon researching Humanism, you gain access to the Black die for the rest of the game.
- Upon researching Engineering, you gain access to the Black die (as with Humanism). Also, for the rest of the game, whenever you Deploy, you gain an additional Deploy action.
- Whenever you check a box with a “C” symbol (on researching Writing and several times along the upper track) you may cross any one box on the Culture grid.
- Whenever you check a box with a “O” symbol (along the lower track), you may gain one Gold.
- Finishing either track triggers the end of the game and provides a scoring bonus.

## Reach

In multiplayer games of ASCII Empires, it is relevant to consider which players have **Reach** to one another for the purposes of military actions or trade. This is determined by two things:

- Seating order: players sitting next to one another always have Reach to each other (exception: 2-player games, p. 12).
- Progress on the Science track: once a player has researched *Navigation*, their Reach will expand.

Reach is most easily thought of as the ability to cross the “water” that separates the players.

- At the beginning of the game, your caravans or armies cannot cross water. They can move into the Empire on your immediate right or left; however, they cannot cross the river that divides those boards, nor can they cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach the players on the opposite side of the table. Thus, at the beginning of the game, you have Reach to the right side of your left-side neighbour’s board and to the left side of your right-hand neighbour’s board.
- Once your Empire has researched *Navigation* (you have checked at least one green box on the lower Science track, see p. 7), you can cross rivers and the Sea, and therefore have Reach to all areas of all players’ boards.

## Military

The art of war is of vital importance to the Empire. Mustering and Deploying armies allows you to raid opponents for Gold or even to establish a Colony on their territory. There are also Barbarians, a non-player enemy faction which one may attack.

Military units are produced by **Garrisons**. Each time one of your Garrisons is activated, you may check the leftmost box of your **Military track**. The boxes of the Military track are arranged in cohorts of 1–3. When a cohort is completely filled in, it becomes an **Army** ready to be Deployed. Checking the final box triggers the end of the game and provides a scoring bonus.

Armies can be **Deployed** to various ends. As you Deploy an Army, you cross the “D” next to it and then may carry out a Deploy action. You may perform the same Deploy action several times per turn, if able.

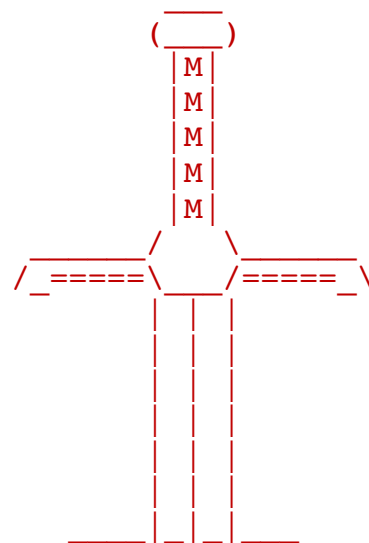
The possible Deploy actions are:

- Raid the Barbarians. This yields you 1 Gold and 1 Happiness.
- Raid another player’s Empire to whom you have Reach. They lose 1 Gold (if able) and gain 1 Unhappiness. If they lost Gold, you gain 1 Gold.
- Cancel another player’s Deploy action. To do this, you must either be the target or have reach to the target. If the aggressor has more Armies, they may Deploy more units to try again. You can choose not to do cancel an opponent’s action even if able to do so.

The manoeuvres involving Colonies (see below) require 2 Deploy actions:

- Establish a Colony on another player’s territory to which you have Reach.
- Raze an opponent’s Colony on your territory. The Colony is crossed over and cannot be activated.

*Example:* Carthage has 3 available Armies and Rome has 1. The Carthaginian player Deploys two Armies and announces he tries to establish a Colony in Rome. The Roman player Deploys his only Army, cancelling one of Carthage’s Deploy actions. The Carthaginian player Deploys his remaining Army for a total of two unopposed Deploy actions. The colony is established.





**Colonies** are permanent settlements on other players' territory. They can only be established by two (unopposed) Deploy actions, not through regular construction.

- A Colony is established by drawing a 5x5 area on any free area on the opponent's map. Mark it with your Emblem.
- The Colony may not touch or overlap other buildings. If its outline intersects Mountainous terrain, pay 1 Gold.
- The opponent may not build in the area taken by another player's Colony.

Colonies can be activated with a die showing "6". When activating a Colony, you can activate one of that player's building types as if the buildings belonged to you. That player gains one Unhappiness.

## Trade & Caravans

Trade can make several Empires better off. Acquiring exotic goods will make your citizens happier but also may allow other players to earn Gold.

Unlike Population, Gold, Military and Science, Trade is not produced by a building. Instead, die results may be allocated directly into one of the five Caravans of varying length. They are completed as follows:

- To check a box, you have to use a die with the specified number or higher.
- The boxes of any given Caravan have to be checked in order from left to right.
- The rows can be completed in any order.
- You may have several unfinished Caravans travelling at once.
- You may check multiple boxes per turn if suitable dice are available.

When the Caravan's journey is finished (the last box of a row is checked), you must announce this to the other players. You will then receive the reward indicated on its right:

increased Happiness and Gold, and (in some cases) an opportunity to check any box in the Science track or the Culture grid. Moreover, each other player with Reach (p. 7) to your Empire earns one Gold.

## Culture

Patronage of arts adds to the prestige of your civilization. Cultural progress allows you to gain Gold, Population, Science or Happiness as creative people from all around the known world flock to your Empire.

The boxes of the **Culture grid** may be checked by using a die with exactly the indicated result. As a row or column of the grid is completed, you gain the associated reward. (Rows provide points for end game scoring; columns provide one-time rewards. The boxes may be checked in any order.)

## Diplomacy

The Diplomacy step comes right after the dice are first rolled at the beginning of a turn. The players have a chance to reroll any or all dice. They might, for example, choose to reroll all dice displaying a value of 1 (and thus, about to trigger Disasters in the next step). A reroll is only possible if the players collectively spend Gold equal to the number of players (e.g. 0000 in a 4-player game).

- The requirement can be met by each player paying one Gold, but this need not necessarily be the case. The players must negotiate.
- Even one player alone may perform a reroll by paying the cost. The other players need not agree; they only need not pay.
- Any number of dice can be rerolled in the Diplomacy phase any number of times.

## Disasters

The Empire is under constant threat from natural calamities and Barbarian raids. As the game proceeds, their likelihood increases.

**Disasters** are checked for each turn after the Diplomacy phase.

1. If any dice showing the value “1” remain at this stage, they are rerolled separately from the rest.
2. Each player looks at the results and checks the leftmost unchecked box from the Disaster grid rows corresponding to those numbers. (If the row is already completely filled in, nothing happens.)
3. If any further 1s resulted from the reroll, the process is then repeated until no 1s remain.
4. The rerolled dice are then placed with the rest and may be used normally during the ensuing Development phase.

Whenever the third (shaded) box of any row of the Disaster grid becomes checked, the corresponding Disaster hits. Many of them offer the player a choice.

- A *Drought* only affects players who have not yet researched Irrigation. The affected player must cross over two Workers or gain one Unhappiness.
- A *Barbarian raid* can be prevented by Deploying 1 Army. The players who cannot or choose not to do this lose two Gold or gain one Unhappiness.
- A *Fire* destroys a building (the player chooses which). The building and its Specialist are lost and cannot be used for the rest of the game. No new buildings may be built in the same space. Alternatively, the player can gain one Unhappiness.

Sometimes hardship breeds creativity: the triggering of some Disasters allows player to check one box from the Culture grid.

## Happiness

A good ruler cares about the Happiness of their subjects. A happy population provides a potentially high amount of points at the end of the game, but creeping Unhappiness may counter some of the gains.

Happiness is gained through Trade (p. 9), Culture (p. 9) and military victories over Barbarians (p. 8). Unhappiness results from Disasters, opponents’ attacks on and Colonization of your Empire (p. 8), Conscription and Taxation (p. 11).

Whenever you gain Happiness or Unhappiness, check the leftmost unchecked box of the corresponding track. The leftmost still unchecked box shows your current score. In the end game scoring, Unhappiness is deducted from Happiness. This may result in the Happiness score being negative.

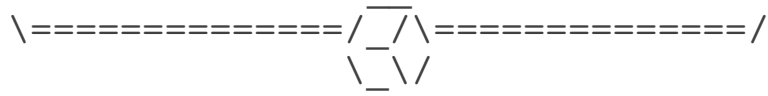
## End of the Game

The end of the game is triggered as soon as any player has completely filled any of their tracks (Population, Gold, either of the two branches of the Science track, Military, Happiness, Unhappiness) – i.e. whenever a “!” symbol is checked.

A player who foresees that they will end the game thus must announce this at the very beginning of that Development phase, before other players have proceeded to mark their sheets. After this final Development phase and the ensuing Deploy phase, the points are calculated.

The player with the most points wins. If several players are tied for most points, the player with the most undeployed Armies wins. In case of further ties, follow the other tiebreakers (p. 11)

# Additional Rules



## Barbarians

The Barbarians are an aggressive non-player faction that lurks on the borders of each Empire. They may perform Raids to the player Empires as a result of Disasters (p. 10), and you may Raid them back (p. 8). All players always have Reach to the Barbarians.

## Conscription and Taxation

When you find your coffers empty or enemy forces at your gate, you can dictate that your citizens come to help – but at the cost of rising Unhappiness.

At any point during the game, you may gain one Unhappiness to immediately get three Gold (Taxation) or to convert up to two Workers to Soldiers (Conscription). No Mine or Barracks are required for these actions.

Taxation and Conscription can be performed anytime, including as a reaction to an unfortunate dice roll or another player's declared Deploy action against you, and can be done several times if you really need to.

## Learning game

For the first few turns in a game with new players, it is recommended that the players take their Development steps sequentially in clockwise order so that everybody can see how each uses the dice (the players still use the same set of die faces).

## Open Information

Players may inspect each other's sheets at any time to deduce what their opponents might be up to.

In the Development phase, even though players take most of their actions independently of one another, there are some instances where a player has to announce to others what they are doing:

- Whenever they complete a Caravan (as this may allow other players to gain benefits).
- Whenever they plan to perform an action that will trigger the end of the game (so that other players know it is the final turn). This must be announced at the very start of the Development phase; otherwise, such action may not be performed that turn.

## Order of Play

For the most part, the order in which players execute their actions does not matter as the Development steps are taken simultaneously (exception: Learning game, see above).

Whenever turn order matters (mostly in the Diplomacy or Deploy steps, although players may invoke this rule at any time they suspect it could matter), the players declare their actions starting with the player with the most undeployed Armies and continuing in descending order.

In case of a tie, player order is determined by

- the most unspent Gold, followed by
- the most advanced single Science track, followed by
- the highest population.

The same logic is followed for tiebreakers in end game scoring (p. 10).

## Player Count

Theoretically, there is no limit to the number of players who can join a single game of ASCII Empires. For practical purposes, 1–7 players is recommended.

The following adjustments are made for solo and two-player games; in games with 3+ players, follow the regular rules.

In a **solo game**,

- There are no other players to trade or wage war with. However, you can still use the Caravans and raid and be raided by the Barbarians (p. 11).
- The game ends after 20 turns, or upon reaching any of the conventional game end triggers, whichever comes first.

In a **two-player game**,

- The players do not have Reach to one another at the beginning of the game (they are located on opposite sides of the Mediterranean). They may only gain Reach through researching *Navigation*.

## Scoring

The scoresheet is on the Empire track. The following items are scored:

- Buildings: the indicated number of points for each of building of that type. Destroyed buildings do not count.
- Gold: two points for each unspent Gold
- Armies: three points for each Army (Deployed or Undeployed)
- Mastery: 21 points for each “!” symbol checked (it is possible to reach several during the final turn)
- Culture: total points from completed rows of the Culture grid
- Happiness: leftmost unchecked number on :) track minus leftmost unchecked number on :( track.

## Symbols

O	Gain 1 Gold
∅	Spend 1 Gold
/	Gain 1 Worker
-/	Lose 1 Worker
:)	Gain 1 Happiness
:(	Gain 1 Unhappiness
X	Check a box in...
S	Check a box on Science track
C	Check a box on Culture grid
&	Every other player with Reach to you...
!	End game trigger / Mastery bonus in Scoring

