

Empire: TCG – Quickstart

Introduction

Welcome to Empire: TCG!

In Empire, you play as a commander, deploying your army to battle your rival commander for control of three frontiers. As the game progresses, you will deploy villagers to supply your army and settlements to increase your tier, giving access to more powerful units and tactics. In the end, either you or your opponent will reduce the others' morale to 0 and emerge victorious!

This quickstart guide, along with the playmat, will teach you the core mechanics of Empire and set you up to play your first game.

Initiative

Rather than players taking turns, the game of Empire runs on initiative. Initiative determines the flow of the game, passing the action back and forth with both players active.

Each time a player takes an action, initiative moves to the other player, letting them take an action.

A player who can't take an action (or doesn't want to), says pass. When a player passes, their opponent gets the initiative, and they may take an action. If they do, the player who passed gets the initiative back, and may take an action or pass again.

When both players have said pass in a row without either taking a different action, play moves to the next phase.

At the start of the game, randomly determine which player will start with the initiative. That player gets the initiative tracker. At the end of each round, the initiative tracker is given to the other player.

Who Decides First?

During a game of Empire, both players will sometimes have to make a decision simultaneously. In those cases, the player with the initiative tracker goes first, followed by the other player.

Rounds and Phases

A game of Empire plays out over a series of rounds – anywhere from a handful and up to twenty or more. Each round moves through three phases – strategy phase, battle phase, and replenishment. After replenishment, a new round begins in the strategy phase.

Strategy Phase

The strategy phase is where most of the critical decisions are made. Here you decide what to deploy and where to fight.

During the strategy phase, on your initiative, you can choose between 6 different actions in any order:

Deploy a villager (once per round): Play a civic card from your hand into your heartland. The card enters ready.

Deploy a settlement (once per round): Play a civic card from your hand into a frontier you are occupying. This increases your tier by one.

Deploy an army card: Pay the supply cost to deploy an army card from your hand with tier equal to or lower than you.

Commit your units (once per round): Choose any number of ready units and move them from your heartland into the advancing position in any combination of frontiers. You may advance multiple units into the same frontier or into different frontiers. Units will fight any opposing units in the same frontier during combat.

Retreat!

As part of your commit action, you may retreat any number of ready units you have occupying a frontier. Retreating a unit exerts it.

Activate a stratagem ability: Pay the supply cost to activate the stratagem ability of one of your units. The unit must be ready.

Pass: Say pass and give the initiative to your opponent. If they also pass, play moves to the battle phase.

Battle Phase

During the battle phase, you make your last-ditch efforts to sway the battle, activating maneuvers and deploying battle tactics. After that, units in each frontier combat each other and deal damage to players.

During the battle phase, on your initiative, you can choose between 3 different actions in any order:

Deploy a battle tactic: Pay the supply cost to deploy a battle tactic from your hand with tier equal to or lower than you.

Activate a maneuver ability: Activate a maneuver ability of a ready unit. A unit can only activate each of its maneuvers once per round. Maneuvers can only be activated during the battle phase.

Pass: Say pass and give the initiative to your opponent. If they also pass, play moves to combat.

Combat

The beginner playmat has rules for resolving combat.

Replenishment

Replenishment is the moment to take a beat, look over your options, draw cards, and reset everything before the next round.

At replenishment, players go through the following steps in order:

Resolve all effects from cards you are fielding that have an effect “at replenishment”.

Reset damage and “until replenishment” effects.

Ready your units and villagers.

Draw your choice of either 1 army card or 2 civic cards.

Move the initiative tracker from one player to the other. That player starts with the initiative in the following round.

Then, you begin a new round, starting with the strategy phase.

Setup

Each player starts the game with 25 morale. If your morale is reduced to 0, you lose the game. If both players morale is reduced to 0 or below at the same time, whoever has the highest morale wins.

Each player shuffles their army deck and their civic deck separately, then draws 5 army cards and 3 civic card.

Sculpted Mulligan

To mulligan, choose any number of cards in your hand that you wish to keep. Put the rest on the bottom of your decks, then draw that many fresh cards to refill your hand up to 5 army cards and 3 civic cards. Shuffle your decks.

For your first game, we recommend that you keep any army card with tier-I and mulligan the rest.

To start, randomly determine who starts the game with the initiative, give that player the initiative tracker, and begin round 1 at the strategy phase.

Flip the page to learn about the different card types.

Empire: TCG – Card Types

Card Anatomy

Tier III
Supply cost 2



Card name **Nwembe, the Caretaker**

Rules text
Sentinel — Whenever Nwembe advances into a territory you have settled, draw an Army card and a Civic card.

Flavor text
"Some things are worth fighting for."

Attack 1 Defence 3

Faction Ndembe - Unique Unit

Card types

In Empire, your cards are split between army cards, which are units, tactics, and monuments, that help you win the game, and your civic cards, which are villagers and settlements, that provide the resources to deploy your army cards. Here is an explanation of each card type.

Villagers

Villagers represent the life and commerce of your heartland, and your ability to leverage it for resources in your conquest. You will gradually deploy villagers throughout the game, providing supplies to deploy your army cards.

You may deploy one villager each round from your hand. Villagers are deployed into your heartland and enter ready to supply your army cards straight away.

As you deploy army cards or activate card abilities with supply costs, you exert villagers to pay the costs. This is called supplying. You cannot exert a villager unless you have a card to supply.

Improvise

If you need to deploy a villager or a settlement but only have the other type of civic card in your hand, you may improvise. To do so, you deploy a settlement into your heartland as a villager, or a villager into a frontier as a settlement.

When you improvise, the card loses any special ability it might have had. It becomes a blank settlement or villager, but still provides tier or supply.

Settlements

As the game progresses and you occupy multiple frontiers, you will place settlements there, increasing your tier. Tier represents the expansion of your army's reach and gives access to your most powerful cards.

You can deploy a settlement from your hand into a frontier you are occupying with one of your units. This is called settling the frontier. Each frontier can be settled by both players.

Each player can only settle each frontier with one settlement. If you want to deploy a different settlement later, the original settlement is put into your graveyard.

Each frontier you have settled adds one to your tier, taking you from tier-I at the start of the game through tier-II and tier-III and finally to tier-IV once all three settlements are placed. Settlements add to your tier even if you are no longer occupying the frontier.

Cost to Deploy

To deploy an army card, you must meet its tier requirement and have enough ready villagers to pay its supply cost.

Units

Units are the bread and butter of most Empire decks. Units fight your battles, occupy and settle frontiers, and deal damage to your opponent, leading you to victory.

When you deploy a unit, it enters play exerted in your heartland. Exerted units deal no damage, cannot commit, and cannot activate their abilities. At replenishment, you ready your exerted units.

In combat, units deal damage equal to their attack to enemy units in the same frontier. Each player chooses which enemy units they want to deal their damage to. When a unit takes damage equal to its defense, it dies and is put into the graveyard. Damage a unit has taken resets at replenishment.

When your units fight and kill all enemy units in a frontier, there may be some excess damage left over. If you are occupying the frontier the fight happened in, the excess damage is dealt to your opponent, causing them to lose that much morale. If you are not occupying the frontier, the excess damage is wasted.

Units can be in three different positions on the board: Your heartland, advancing into a frontier, or occupying a frontier.

The beginner playmat has full rules for unit positions.

Desperate Measures

If you don't have the necessary tier, you may deploy cards that are one tier higher than you currently are by adding their tier to the supply cost.

For instance, you may deploy Nwembe in tier-II by paying 5 supplies instead of the usual 2.

Skirmisher Units

Skirmisher units are generally more aggressive than other units. While they don't help you increase your tier, they are good for putting pressure on your opponent's morale and supporting your occupying units.

Skirmishers are a subtype of units, which follow the same rules, with two key differences:

They cannot occupy frontiers (and thus cannot help you deploy your settlements).

They deal excess damage to your opponent from the advancing position, even if you are not occupying the frontier.

Exerted vs. Ready

Units in Empire are either exerted (horizontal) or ready (vertical). An exerted unit deals no damage, cannot commit, and cannot activate its abilities.

Tactics

Tactics encompass both the magical and practical strategies that you employ to summon tokens, kill your opponent's units, deal damage directly, or otherwise turn the tides of the war.

Tactics are single use effects that happen when you deploy the card. Once the effect has taken place, the tactic is put into your graveyard.

If a tactic refers to a target (such as "an allied unit", "a monument" or similar) there must be valid targets in play in order to deploy the tactic.

Battle Tactics

Battle tactics function to surprise your opponent after they have already committed their units to certain frontiers.

Battle tactics follow the same rules as other tactics but can be deployed in the battle phase in addition to the strategy phase.

Icons

Some cards use the following icons in their rules text as shorthand for abilities and game states.

Exert: ☹

Exert this card to activate its ability.

Occupy: 🏠

This ability is only active if the unit is occupying a frontier.

Supply: 📦

This ability provides or costs some amount of supplies.

Tier: II, III, IV

This ability is only active once you've reached a certain tier.

Monuments

Monuments are ongoing effects which are worth fighting for – and against. Monuments are played into frontiers, and persist for several rounds, so long as you defend the frontier from your opponent.

You can deploy a monument into a frontier your opponent is not occupying. The monument fills the occupying slot but does not count as you occupying the frontier – as such, you cannot settle the frontier, and your units don't deal excess damage in that frontier.

Each round, at the beginning of the battle phase, the monument progresses. Put a progress counter on it and trigger its progress effect.

At replenishment, if your monument has a number of progress counters on it equal to or higher than its completion number, trigger its completion effect. Then, put the monument into your graveyard.

If your opponent wins a combat in the frontier your monument is in, your monument is destroyed.

If you win a combat in the frontier your monument is in, you may either choose to return your surviving units to your heartland, keeping the monument, or you may destroy your monument and move a unit in to occupy the frontier.

A complete set of rules and a tutorial is available at Empirecardgame.com