### Resisting Rome

The middle-sized box in my pyramid is *Palmyra*, the 2013 game from Bernd Eisenstein and Irongames (and not to be confused with the Reiner Knizia game of the same name from 1996). The contents of this box are mainly terrain tiles, along with cardboard coins and chunky wooden playing pieces – two for each player. No prizes for guessing that this is a tile-laying game.

The first clever thing about this is the way the tiles fit together. There are two sizes of tile. The smaller ones are square, the larger ones octagonal. The octagonal tiles do not have equilateral sides: they are essentially a larger square with the corners cut off, so that the longer sides are the same length as the smaller, square tiles. The effect of this is that octagonal tiles will touch each other on their short sides and enclose square tiles – which will never touch each other.

As being next to each other is important, note that a square tile will be next to a maximum of four (octagonal) tiles, while an octagon could touch eight others (four square and four octagonal). It takes a while to get your head around this when you start playing the game – I'm used to players' exclamations when they realise their carefully worked-out plan won't work because the square tiles cannot touch!

Regardless of their size, the tiles all show a type of terrain – desert (yellow sand dunes), hills (green) or mountains (shades of grey) – and may also have a 'feature': a tower, a lake or a caravan. All the tiles show a coin on their reverse.

There are also a few tiles showing city buildings and these are used to form the city of Palmyra at the start of the game. The number of city tiles used depends on the number of players, but this area counts as a single space that holds any number of pieces.

This is good because all players' pieces start in Palmyra. The tall piece is your censor, who brings in cash (and money is what you need to win the game), while the shorter piece – an outline of a crested,



Just starting a game of *Palmyra*

Roman helmet – is your legion and earns additional tiles. The two pieces work much the same way: players place a tile adjacent to one of their pieces and then move it onto the new tile. They can repeat this to a maximum of two tiles (if one of them shows a feature) or four (as long as none of them has a feature). The tiles can be either size, but not two squares, of course, since they are never adjacent.

As they place their tiles, players tot up their income: +1 for each adjacent, unoccupied tile of the same terrain, +2 for each adjacent, unoccupied feature of the same type. (There are several useful examples in the rules that make this clear.) If they moved their legion, they take the income as tiles, alternating between square and octagonal. If it was their censor, they take cash.

They have one extra option with their censor: to flip over one of their tiles to show the coin side. From now on, the player will get an extra coin for each flipped tile when the censor collects more cash than the total of their flipped tiles – a useful bonus at the cost of reducing your options for tiles to place.

Instead of placing tiles and moving either figure, players can "reorganise" as their turn. When they do this, they draw a tile and may then move either or both of their pieces to an empty tile (or the city) or swap them over. This can be a very useful tactical move – especially when other players have blocked in one of your pieces (and they will!). However, it does mean you're not earning anything for a turn and should be used sparingly.

The game ends when a player needs to draw a coin or tile and there isn't one left. The player with the most money wins, flipped over tiles being the tie-breaker.



Hoarding liquorice for *Candy Crave*

*Palmyra* is a clever little game. It's obvious that you will want to build up a stock of tiles first, to maximise your later opportunities to then bring in cash. However, each turn you have to consider what tiles you have available, where you could play them, where this would leave your playing pieces and what opportunities this would leave for your opponents. Tiles are displayed openly, so it is possible for analysis paralysis to set in as you weigh up options.

However, *Palmyra* remains a relatively light game and I don't think it warrants much deep thought. I've played several enjoyable games at the Swiggers games club, where it's gone down well. It is quite an abstract game, but there's enough about it to keep me interested. It remains a regular in my games bag. It's now been implemented online at Boîte à Jeux (www.boiteajeux.net) and I've been playing it there too.

*Palmyra* was designed by Bernd Eisenstein and is published by Irongames. It is a tile-laying game for 1-5 players, aged 10+, and takes about 45 minutes to play. It gets 8/10 on my highly subjective scale.