

Through his games, Bernd Eisenstein has already traveled a considerable part of the ancient world, from the PELOPONNES (2009) over CARTHAGO (2010) and Rom (PAX, 2011) to the Middle East (PERGAMENNON, 2011; and now also PALMYRA). The latest game by the Berlin author had a genesis of three years, primarily a result of his slimming the game down. This ended up as a lean tile-laying game with a simple structure that nevertheless requires varied decisions.

In the 1st century A.D., the ambitions of the Roman Empire were still far from being satisfied. Therefore, the emperor decreed that the sphere of power was to be expanded, with the intention of getting the metropolis on the Tiber additional wealth. So the game revolves around the acquisition of land and money, intertwined in a very nice way. In terms of appearance, Eisenstein wanted to get away from a strictly square display like CARCASSONNE; but he didn't like the alternative of a grid of hexagons either. Instead, he chose large octagons, each with four long and four short edges, which have to be put together diagonally. The gaps that are inevitably created are filled with smaller square tiles. Whether it's octagon or square, each tile shows one of three types of landscape, sometimes with an image (watch tower, oasis or caravan) on it.

The provincial capital of Palmyra consists of three to nine spaces, depending on the number of players. Each player starts with one legionnaire to expand the territory and one censor to collect money. Movement and the accounting mode are identical for both types of figures. On your turn, you place a tile adjacent to one of your figures and then move either the censor or the legionnaire there. You can also refrain from placing a tile and instead move both of your figures.



If you place a tile with an image on it, you may add one more landscape tile without an image; if you place only tiles without an image, you may lay out up to four tiles on one turn; in this case, you move the originally chosen figure every time.

Matching the landscape type of the neighboring tiles gives you either one new tile for every matching tile or one coin; you get twice as much for matching images. Since cash is the only thing that is vital for the win, you would prefer to move only the

to push up this bonus as much as possible.

If a figure needs to be relocated since all neighboring spaces are already occupied, you suffer from a reduction of speed that is soothed only by your being able to draw a landscape tile. However, this option can also be used in a tactical sense, in order to lead the censor or the legionnaire to more lucrative areas.

In the four- or five-player game, not only is the skirmish for the best places particularly pronounced, but the annoyance component becomes especially important as well, since spaces that are occupied by figures don't count; that means they give a player neither new tiles nor money.

The game ends as soon as either one of the two tile piles doesn't have enough new tiles left, or all the money (120 coins overall) has been spent.

PALMYRA is easily comprehensible and quick, but provides space for tactical dodges. The two- or three-player game takes no more than approximately half an hour; with more players, the playing time is just under one hour. Irrespective of the number of players, the game tends

to start sedately, since there are not too many options in the beginning. But as the province of Palmyra expands, the dynamics gradually grow.

In the Expert game, the options are increased by a Caesar tile. Caesar allows you to swap the function of the censor and the legionnaire if you pay one coin, and provides for increased revenues. Given such an excellent cost-benefit ratio, it almost goes without saying that Caesar is often wooed away.

The solo variant that is also included is particularly well suited to becoming familiar with the game; here, the objective is to collect more and more coins in four consecutive rounds.

censor. But everybody starts with just one square and one eight-cornered tile, and this doesn't get you very far. Additionally, it is advisable to use your legionnaire to get a proper selection of landscape tiles so that you are prepared for any situation and, especially, can benefit from matching images.

Although the scarcity of the tile selection reduces your options considerably, you should not just hoard tiles in order to make a big haul in the end. If the censor collects more coins on his next action than you have tiles lying in front of you with the coin facing up, you receive the coins on the tiles as an additional tribute. Therefore, everybody is eager, of course,

Once again, Eisenstein has enriched his private ancient world with a good game. The materials are sound and the graphic design by Klemens Franz is impeccable; as for the instructions, however, the author could have done some more fine-tuning.

PALMYRA is fun, especially with fewer players. The slimming down that Eisenstein had administered to his prototype was really good for the game; I didn't get the impression that there was anything missing in the game. *Wieland Herold/sbw*

PALMYRA (Iron Games) by Bernd Eisenstein; for 1-5 players, 10+ years; duration about 30-45 minutes; price: about 24 €.

