

# Civilization in Time-lapse

Settle lands in order to use their resources and make various discoveries which will help you later in play – granted, it really doesn't sound like a blazing new idea for a game. On the other hand, the designer is Philippe Keyaerts, who already brought us VINCI, Evo and most recently SMALL WORLD. Also, the goddess Athena is on the box cover, making big dark eyes at you, which can only be another reason to take a closer look at the game. The eyes have it ...

The lands we're settling here are easily recognizable as Greece. However, there are also three extra islands in the Mediterranean to the south of Crete: Atlantis. Therefore we're shrouded in the mists of time here, right at the dawn of civilization. The land and sea areas are rather arbitrarily divided up into regions that we may as well call spaces. Each of the land spaces contains a resource.

The first settlers pour down from the north into Greece. Settlers



added later in the game are placed onto players' occupied spaces. In his turn, a player might for instance place a settler onto the board and then move it as many spaces as he likes. There's no limit on movement, but reason urges us to take small steps, since we pay for movement using Time points. It costs one Time to cross one land space, twice as much by sea. The Time that you use up is tracked along a



path at the edge of the board, which also serves to

show who takes the next turn – which is always whoever is last on the Time track, meaning whoever has used the least Time so far. It's not unusual for a player to be able to take several turns in a row as a result.

Whoever has settled a land space can use the resource on that space without any limits. As in PANTHEON, a resource is never used up as long as the settler remains there. The only exception is if a fellow player also has his eye on the space. In which case, you fight for it, and the resolution is breathtakingly simple and elegant. When a settler lands on an occupied space, he takes control and has exclusive use of that resource from then on. This will cost the player a differing number of Time points, however, depending on whether his military is weaker, equal or more advanced. The loser then gets a Sandglass token as consolation prize, which can be used to make Time run slower – Sandglasses save you having to advance along the Time track.

So what are all these various resources on the land spaces





actually good for? The answer's on a second game board which is placed on the table next to the map. This is where the discovery tokens are set out at the beginning of the game, in variable order. One thing that stays constant is that they are grouped by cost, with each costing from two to five resources. The variable order introduces a random cost factor to which discoveries you can buy for which particular resources.

## Discover the potential ... of discoveries

There are many different discoveries a civilization can make; Astronomy and Cartography save you Time on sea travel, Medicine saves Time when you place new settlers, Swords – these are a discovery too, in game terms – increase your military strength, while still others bring you Prestige points, which decide the winner at the end of the game. This wide variety of options means that the first game will be used to get to know the various possibilities.

It takes Time of course to make a discovery, so much that you could move a settler seven spaces for the same investment. However, discoveries bring various bonuses, such as getting resources without needing the land, or getting Prestige points, Sandglasses or more settlers. You'll certainly need the latter, since each player has only four settlers at the beginning of the game. That's enough to settle four spaces and use their resources – as long as your fellow players keep the peace. Most of the time, that turns out to be wishful thinking.

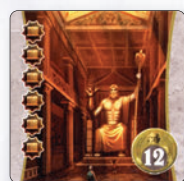
Whoever places a settler onto a space can't use that resource for a discovery straight away, since settlement and discovery are alternative actions – you can only do one or the other on any given turn. Whoever has just secured a resource could well find that he doesn't have it any longer by the time his turn comes round again, depending on how aggressive the other players are feeling. Experience has taught us that the more players at the table, the more they attack one another.



One particular class of discovery is the Wonder. To build one of these (or rather, to get the corresponding token) you

don't need resources, but stars, which are out on the board at the beginning of the game in a certain number of spaces and which represent the local population, as it were – at least, they can be conquered and claimed using the same simple combat rules. Wonders are very good for your Prestige of course and bring in a whole load of points.

So far, so good: we can plan what we want to do each turn, and our fellow players can of course thwart our plans. But the game's called OLYMPOS, and that means of course that the Olympian gods of Greek mythology are also going to play their part somehow. They do this through two decks of cards which come into play whenever someone has used up a set amount of



Time. There are the destiny cards, which sound rather negative but actually give the player who draws them a permanent advantage which he can use whenever he likes. The god cards are quite different, since this is when the gods intervene in person, and they seem to have only two moods; either they will reward whoever has the most of Zeus' relics, or they punish whoever has the least.

There's one Zeus relic out on the board, meaning that the space it's in will constantly be changing hands. Others come into play via the destiny cards or purchased permanently as a discovery.

The Time track decides when the game ends. An interesting feature is that in the endgame, every player gets to decide for himself whether to take one final turn. In the final analysis, this is really just an exercise in mental arithmetic, since Prestige points are also awarded for the final position on the track, with the player with little Time left receiving correspondingly few points. You also get points for the lands you hold, for discoveries and Wonders, and for the Prestige that you earned during the game. The game plays out in 60 to 90 minutes, or so the box claims.



We also managed faster games with three players. With five, it can last considerably longer if the players get caught up in a clash of civilizations.

## Limited replay value

OLYMPOS leaves me with mixed feelings. The graphic design is outstanding; I say this even though I'll be accused of liking the cheesecake imagery on the god cards a little too much.



Various play aids are unobtrusively worked into the game board itself and the discoveries board, but the fact that this latter board is printed on pretty flimsy cardstock certainly spoils the impression. It's also rather irksome that there's no cheat sheet for every player when it comes to the meaning of the cards and the function of the discovery tokens. In the first few games at least, you'll find yourself consulting the rule-book quite frequently. It would be a good idea to make a copy of the relevant pages for each player.

The game itself is neatly devised. Depending on the number of players, various territories may be unavailable to settle and there will be different numbers of some of the discovery tokens. The way the



discover-  
ies intermesh with the  
bonus markers and these in turn feed into  
the Wonders is very pleasing, as is the  
Time track – even if this rather reminds us  
of the alea game GLEN MORE.

However, we had to revise these positive  
first impressions with every game we  
played. The variable  
set-up doesn't actually change much in  
the gameplay. The  
destiny cards and  
god cards feel as  
though they were  
pasted on at the last  
minute, and a five-player game has too  
much downtime. There's really not so  
much to think about that you need to sit  
through everybody else's turn. A shame.



KMW/sw



Title: Olympos  
 Publisher: Ystari  
 Designer: Philippe Keyaerts  
 Artist: Arnaud Demaegd  
 Players: 3–5  
 Age: about 10 and up  
 Duration: about 90 minutes  
 Price: about 30 €

Reviewer	Playing appeal
KMW .....	7
Udo Bartsch .....	6
Christwart Conrad .....	6
Stuart W. Dagger .....	8
Matthias Hardel* .....	7

*\* I would have given a 9 after the first game. Actually playing the game is less fun than learning the rules. Oddly, the game is usually a close-run thing except that one player will always lag far behind – without having done anything obviously wrong. Can only really be recommended for four players.*