



TACTICS GUIDE

BY MARK WALKER

ACG's Battle Book arms gamers with the real-time tactics that win on Empire Earth III's battlefields.

Empire Earth is a long and storied franchise. Starting with the original Empire Earth, which was released in November 2001, and continuing through Empire Earth II, the franchise received critical acclaim and significant sales. If there was one complaint, however, it was that the franchise was a bit too detailed—presented a few too many options. Some gamers were thrilled at the depth of the design, but some others were slightly intimidated. Sierra has listened to the legion of fans and have answered their call for a simpler, more streamlined version of their popular game. Empire Earth III is that answer.

Gone are the semi-confusing multitudes of civilizations. Instead, Empire Earth III allows gamers to pick from three: the West, Middle East, and Far East. Although the reduction in civilizations certainly makes the game simpler, Mad Doc software has added some additional strategic flavor in the form of the turn-based, strategic game over the tactical, real-time strategy engine. Here gamers can determine exactly how they want to go about dominating the world. They can choose which provinces to defend, which

provinces to attack, and what to do with them after they are conquered. Of course conquering the world isn't an easy process. You'll not only need to fight opposing civilizations but native tribes, too. Although the tribes that are native to a region are usually not quite as formidable as an advanced civilization, they do require you to zoom into the province and get your hands dirty defeating them on the tactical



Empire Earth III is a beautiful game.

map. These intricacies, coupled with numerous epochs and hundreds of units make Empire Earth III a game that is not easily mastered. And that, my friend, is where this battle book may come in handy. Although not the definitive guide to all things Empire Earth III, it will help you hit the ground running. So, follow along as we take a look at the game and provide tips that will help you on your way to Empire Earth III mastery.



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TICKLE THOSE KEYS

There's nothing to real-time strategy, right? You lasso some units here, click over there, build a building there, collect some resources, and you win. There's nothing to real-time strategy right? Wrong. There's quite a bit to it, and part of that bit begins with the interface. If you want to be good at Empire Earth III, you have to go beyond lassoing and clicking. You have to learn the shortcuts. Shortcuts both on the keyboard and with the mouse. Here are some of my favorites, and the actions that they perform.

CTRL+COMMA

This selects all idle builders. Why is that good? It helps you ensure that all your people are gainfully employed. A gainfully employed empire is a prosperous empire, and a prosperous empire is an

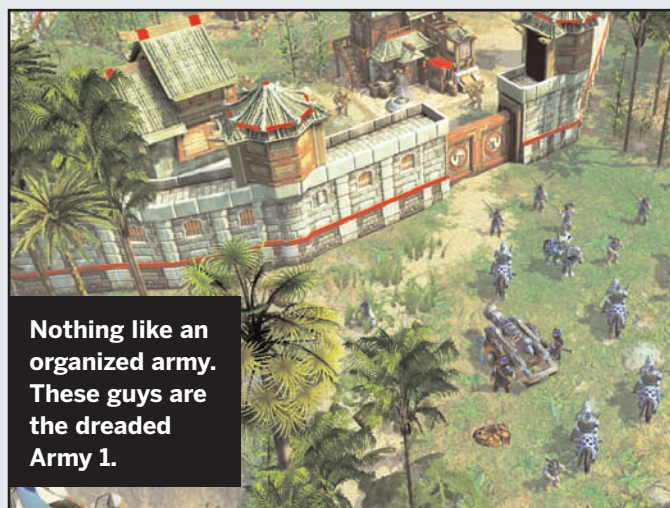
empire that is ready to kick serious Empire Earth III tail.

CTRL+NUMBER

Pressing this combination does what it has done since the folks at Westwood came up with it way back in the days of Command and Conquer. It places the currently selected units into a group. This is useful for about a quarter million things, but I'll only mention a couple.

Thing One:

This allows you to form a group of units that provide mutual protection, for example, infantry, tanks, and mobile artillery pieces. The artillery pieces bombard opposing infantry and take out buildings. The tanks protect the mobile artillery, and the infantry protect the tanks from other infantry. Another good example is placing pikemen with archers. Pikemen



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will protect the archers from cavalry, while the archers attrite any units attacking the pikemen.

Thing Two: Keeping organized. Placing your units in groups allows you to better organize your attacks. For example, you can place your onagers in one group and your pikemen and archers in another. The second group can clear the enemy infantry units around the enemy buildings and protect the onagers while they rapidly (much more rapidly than the archers can) demolish the enemy buildings.

COMBAT KEYS

I like to call these combat keys because they affect how your unit fights. Learning them might spell the difference between victory and defeat, which is about seven letters by my calculations.

Unit stances are basic yet important combat keys. Your units can enter one of three stances: **Standard**, **Hold**, or **Guard**.

Standard is just that, the standard stance, the mode in which your units will most often reside. In Standard mode they will attack any approaching enemy units, and even chase them for a small distance—but they won't go nuts chasing the units back to their base (or wherever). This is important, as you'll see when we get to the combat tips.

In the Hold stance, units will engage units that come within range, but won't

move to keep the enemy units in range.

This is a great stance to use when assigning units to watch over an important location, such as a market.

The final stance, Guard, is like Hold on steroids, or off steroids, depending on how you look at it. Units in the Guard stance will only attack when attacked.

There are three other useful combat-type commands, **Charge**, **Skirmish**, and the



area-specific command that is specialized for each group. Charge (short cut key "C") is best used for melee specialty units, especially for big groups of them. Invoking this command gives the attacking units a bonus when they first enter combat. As you can imagine, it's best used to shatter enemy forces in one fell swoop. The ideal recipients of a charge attack are units that are strong at range combat and weak at the hand-to-hand stuff. Archers are a good example.

Think of Skirmish as the opposite of Charge. Units given the Skirmish order will



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attempt to engage enemies at maximum range. It almost goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway, that this order is best given to units that are strong with ranged weaponry. For example, to continue in the Ancient epoch, archers.

Each of the three cultures also has a specific skill. Westerners can recuperate, Far Easterners can dig in, and Mid-Easterners can spring an ambush. Use each intelligently. The Westerners' ability to heal themselves is a significant skill, but it requires that the healing (or repairing) units do nothing else. So, when in contact with the enemy, you need at least two formations to take advantage of the skill: While one fights, the other can heal. After the resting formation is healed, it can once again be thrown against the bad guys, allowing the formerly engaged unit to retreat to the rear and recuperate themselves.

The Far Easterners can use their dig-in skill on both offense and defense. On defense the skill can enhance the defenses of vital locations; it's a straightforward application of the skill. On offense the employment is more subtle, but no less effective. Here's how you do it. Find a good defensive position near an enemy building or city center that you wish to take. This position must be close to your objective, but not so close that it immediately incites a counter attack.

After you have chosen the position, dig in with all but a few units. This will increase the defensive bonus of those defending units. Of course, they won't be able to move until you choose to leave the fortifications, but that's okay. Now take the handful of your remaining mobile units and attack your objective. The goal is not to capture the objective, but rather trick the defenders into counterattacking. After you engage the enemy, retreat to your fortifications. With luck, the enemy will follow and dash themselves against your dug-in defenders. Repeat as necessary until the enemy has been sufficiently weakened. Then release your troops from the fortifications, attack, and take your objective.

The Mid-Easterner's ambush is perhaps the most interesting of the three unique combat actions. It works like this. Lasso a bunch of units, direct them to a location, and order them to spring an ambush. When enemies approach the position, your ambushers will attack them from the trees, bushes, building, or whatever, and assault them, receiving a bonus with their initial attack.

The best way to employ this combat technique is similar to what we did with the dug in Far Easterners. Set the ambush, wait for the units to go stealthy, attack the enemy with a small number of decoy units, and then lead them back to the ambush.



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A GAME OF ECONOMICS

Like most other real-time strategy games, Empire Earth III is actually a game of economics. Yes, you need to build armies, and yes, you need to be able to effectively fight with armies, but you need to be able to finance those armies (and so does your opponent) to win.

This leads to some obvious, and some not-so-obvious decisions, on the tactical map. On the obvious side of things is the



Harassing an opponent's production.

construction of economy-growing buildings. These consist of warehouses and markets (bazaars, or what have you) and their derivatives.

These are the first buildings you want to place. The city center produces small amounts of resources and money, but not enough to sustain a winning war effort. To do that, you have to place warehouses and markets. Furthermore, you have to ensure that both are fully staffed; this maximizes their production. It doesn't hurt to place your mar-

kets close to your city centers either.

NOTE: The Western and Far Eastern civilizations use builders. The Far Eastern's soldiers also double as builders, which is pretty neat. The point is, if one builder is good, two builders are better. You can assign a second builder to a construction site by clicking the builder and then right clicking the construction site. Doing so hastens the building's completion.

As soon as the buildings are completed,

be sure to send out scouts (always in pairs) to explore the surrounding area. Keep in mind that the only thing better than one warehouse is two, and the same goes for markets. Remember, however, you can only place one market in each area. Finally, station a handful of units at remote or semi-remote warehouses and markets to protect them from enemy raids. And that brings us to the flip side of the coin.

If warehouses and markets are good for you, they are good for your opponent too. Conversely, destroying his warehouses—or at least the workers manning them—is good for you. Scout the map, find your opponent's warehouses (and markets), and attack them. The easiest way to do this, especially early in the game, is to attack remote warehouses. Attack them with fast units, such as cavalry or machine-gun-toting motorcycles. Even if you can't destroy the warehouse you can eliminate its workers, marginalizing its



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effectiveness.

A final note on production: Get your newly produced units to the front quickly. You can do so in one of two ways. The first is to use really fast mouse maneuvers: Flick back to your base, select a newly minted



unit, and then flick back to the battle and click where you want it to go. The mini-map speeds this process, but is nevertheless time-consuming and distracting when you have a battle to manage. The second method is much better. Click on the factory, barracks, or whatever, select the units that you want built and then right click on the location to which you want them to march, clank, roll, float, or fly after construction. Doing so supplies a continuous stream of units to the front, ready for your orders.

STRATEGIC THINKING

One of the most interesting things about Empire Earth III is the strategic overlay in World Domination mode. This turn-based global strategyscape (sic) gives greater meaning to the battles fought on the tacti-

cal maps, and satisfies the megalomaniac in us all. Let's take a look at some techniques for maximizing your global effectiveness.

WORLD EVENTS

World events may seem like a distraction, but they are often anything but. These events offer unique opportunities to fight, expand, or conquer. Take advantage of these opportunities. The awards for successfully completing a world event are often unique to the event and unavailable in any other way.

FIGHTING

As you probably know by now, armies don't fight per se on the world map. Most battles are resolved on the battle map (of all places!) in a manner similar to a skirmish. That doesn't mean, however, that the makeup of the army isn't critical or that what you do on the world map doesn't affect the battle on the battle map. It does.

It's important to have a good balance of military provinces. Each can hold two armies, and that is what you need to safely



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attack many provinces, especially those held by more than native tribes.

Although armies can be customized, the default load (attack, defense, or naval) works just fine for most instances. Armies only move one territory per turn, sometimes making it difficult to coordinate attacks on distant provinces. For that reason, I recommend immediately researching Roads and Infrastructure whenever available. Keep in mind that any province with Roads and Infrastructure grants a free move to an army moving through it, in essence allowing the army to move two provinces.

Armies are valuable, and you should treat them accordingly. If an army loses a battle, it's eliminated. Hence, don't throw armies into battles in which you don't feel confident. Be very careful using the game's auto-resolve feature. Yes, it can be tedious building a base and fighting each battle, but it can be even more tedious constantly rebuilding armies. Simply put, if you don't have at least two to one (two armies against the opponent's one army) odds and equal technology, don't attack. You can fudge that a little bit when combating native tribes. Frequently, you can win these battles with little more than one to one odds.

Two words on militias ... build them. They aren't very powerful, and they are immobile, but they are better than nothing.

COMMERCE AND TECHNOLOGY

As on the battle map, commerce and technology is very important on the strategic map. It's tempting to concentrate on military provinces, hoping to build a massive army capable of dominating the world. Resist that temptation. Capture provinces that have strong research and trade and then utilize them to the max.

Trade provides the income to run your empire. Technology provides the means to



dominate your opponents. It is much easier to fight with a small number of high-technology units than it is a horde of low techers (sic).

THE FINAL STRATEGY

Empire Earth is a rich game, full of options and opportunities. There is no perfect strategy, no sure-fire way to win the game. I hope, however, that reading this battle book not only primes your interest but makes you a better player, a master of the globe.



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