

Races

Choosing the right race isn't like picking the car or the thimble in Monopoly--it's a vital aspect of any contest. That's why we put together scouting reports that detail each civilization's strengths and weaknesses. But before we get into the nitty-gritty breakdowns on each, here are a few general tips.

Examine the game settings: A big-sized map with few combatants might mean that resources and Wonders will be central to the game. An island setting will mean that you're going to need naval strength.

Are you playing on teams? If you are, it will be to your advantage if you and your teammates choose civilizations that complement one another. One player should choose a race that is good at aggression, others should choose races that will be best suited for putting together and defending a Wonder. This way you'll have your bases covered.

Good for sea-oriented maps: The Greeks, Minoans, Persians, Phoenicians, and Yamato all have a full range of ship-oriented bonuses that suit them for naval combat. The Egyptians also stand out--they have a nice selection of ground combat units and almost all the available research paths open. The Persians particularly stand out, though, when it comes to naval warfare--their Triremes have a 50 percent faster fire rate.

Aggressors: The Hittites, Sumerians, and Persians are all built extremely well for combat.

Development: If building a Wonder is your hunger, the Yamato, whose Villagers move 30 percent faster than normal right from the start, are a great bet. Unfortunately, their Tower capabilities suck--they can't upgrade Towers at all--so you'll have to use some other means of defense. The Shang are also pretty good, with their 30-percent-cheaper Villager cost and double wall hit points. The Babylonians are great at defending a Wonder, with double wall *and* Tower hit points.

Now on with the descriptions.

Assyrian

Bonuses

+40 percent fire rate for Archery Range units
Villagers 30 percent faster

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Phalanx, Centurion

Archery: Improved Bowman, Composite Bowman, Elephant Archer, Heavy Horse Archer

Cavalry: War Elephant

Navy: Catapult Trireme, Juggernaut, Heavy Transport

R&D: Architecture, Bronze Shield, Nobility, Alchemy, Aristocracy, Chain Mail, Engineering, Iron Shield

What Does It All Mean?

You really can't go wrong with this tribe--they have a nice balance of combat and growth, and their Villagers move 30 percent faster than normal. In the early portions of your game as the Assyrians, use your Archery Range units and their 40-percent-faster fire rate to your advantage, particularly with the Chariot Archers. Raid an enemy city with a cluster of these ancient Hell's Angels and you can seriously cripple your opponent's work forces. Because these guys don't have Elephants of any type, you'll have to be on guard against enemy pachyderm attacks. One advantage the Assyrians do have is that they can build the full range of Siege Weapons. A great defense

against approaching Elephants is a line of Ballistas or Helepolii. On the infantry front, the Assyrians lack the Phalanx and Centurion Academy improvements. Still, the Hoplite is a better bet than any Barracks unit, provided you have a little extra cash (which you should, considering you can't buy Elephant units). In general, however, the Assyrians are the Deion Sanders of Age of Empires: great for attack, defense, and building and defending a Wonder.

Babylonian

Bonuses

Double wall and Tower hit points
+30 percent Priest rejuvenation
+30 percent stone mining

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Phalanx, Centurion

Archery: Elephant Archer, Heavy Horse Archer

Cavalry: Heavy Cavalry, Cataphract, War Elephant

Siegecraft: Ballista, Helepolis

Navy: Trireme, Catapult Trireme, Juggernaught, Heavy Transport

R&D: Chain Mail, Iron Shield, Metallurgy

What Does It All Mean?

Do NOT use the Babylonians if naval battles are in your future. Lacking a Trireme, this civilization will simply get its butt kicked on the high seas. If you are playing as the Babylonians, you'd better build lots of double-strength Towers. Or better yet, get away from the coastlines, even if it means completely relocating your tribe--you'll waste a lot of wood and effort fending off superior naval forces. So what good are the Babylonians? Use them to build a Wonder and then fall back and defend it. With double wall and Tower hit points, and a 30 percent stone-mining bonus, you can really dig yourself in with these guys.

Choson

Bonuses

+80 Long Swordsman and Legion hit points
+2 Tower range
-30 percent Priest cost

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Phalanx, Centurion

Archery: Chariot Archer, Composite Bowman, Elephant Archer, Heavy Horse Archer

Cavalry: Chariot, War Elephant

Siegecraft: Catapult, Heavy Catapult

Navy: Catapult Trireme, Heavy Transport, Juggernaught

R&D: Nobility, Alchemy, Aristocracy, Chain Mail, Engineering, Iron Shield

What Does It All Mean?

The Choson are not a Gamecenter favorite. The increased Long

Swordsman and Legion hit points, increased Tower range, and decreased Priest cost are simply not worth having but one type of Archer and no Catapults (save the Stone Thrower).

Cavalry is the key to winning with the Choson--use your Cavalry and Heavy Cavalry to continuously strike into the hearts of your opponents' towns and harass their Villagers. If conquest is your game, you're going to have to protect your fragile Ballistas and Helepolii--they can't take much damage at all.

One other tactic you might want to consider using with the Choson is to build mass amounts of Priests (five for the price of four) and a full range of upgrades, and then roam the countryside converting buildings and enemy units.

Egyptian

Bonuses

+20 percent gold mining

+33 percent Chariot and Chariot Archer hit points

+3 Priest range

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Broad Swordsman, Long Swordsman, Legion, Phalanx, Centurion

Archery: Horse Archer, Heavy Horse Archer

Cavalry: Cavalry, Heavy Cavalry, Cataphract

Siegecraft: Ballista, Catapult, Helepolis, Heavy Catapult

R&D: Bronze Shield, Coinage, Iron Shield, Siegecraft

What Does It All Mean?

Although on the surface the Egyptians don't appear well suited for combat, they can more than hold their own with anyone. With a full range of naval options and an automatic 20 percent increase in gold mining, you'll be able to more easily afford all the Elephant units you're going to be building.

The only drawback to the Egyptians is that their only Siege Weapon is the Stone Thrower. But Stone Throwers are not much different from Catapults, and between them and the Elephant Archers and War Elephants, you should be all right.

One sneaky tactic you can use with the Egyptians that will take advantage of the Priests' increased conversion range and your early gold mining bonus is to pack a bunch of them up in a boat, wade past enemy lines, drop in from behind, and convert everything you can see, particularly buildings and Towers.

Greek

Bonuses

Academy units (Hoplite, Phalanx, and Centurion) 30 percent faster

War Ships 30 percent faster

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Swordsmen (Broad Swordsman, Long Swordsman, Legions)

Archery: Chariot Archer, Improved Bowman, Composite Bowman, Horse Archer, Heavy Horse Archer, Elephant Archer

Cavalry: Chariot, Cataphract, War Elephant

R&D: Monotheism, Jihad, Metallurgy

What Does It All Mean?

The Greeks are one tough clan...if you're into naval warfare. A complete lack of Archers, save the lowly Bowman, severely hampers this clan's war-making capacity. They do have decent Stable units, but in the early ages of a game, you're going to be missing the Chariot. At least these guys have naval might, with a full range of ships and a 30 percent speed bonus. And they have Catapults and Ballistas, plus one upgrade each.

Still, if you're planning on making war, not love, there are better choices to be found. Use the Greeks only if you're forced to, or if you're playing on a Small Islands map.

Hittite

Bonuses

Double hit points for Stone Thrower, Catapult, Heavy Catapult

+1 damage for Archery Range units

+4 war ship range

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Long Swordsman, Legion

Archery: Improved Bowman, Composite Bowman

Cavalry: Heavy Cavalry, Cataphract

Siegecraft: Ballista, Helepolis

Navy: Fishing Ship, Trireme, Catapult Trireme, Heavy Transport, Juggernaut

R&D: Mysticism, Polytheism, Afterlife, Fanaticism, Jihad, Monotheism

What Does It All Mean?

It's a crying shame that the Hittites don't have the naval capacity to build Triremes--if they did, they'd be the perfect choice for aggressor types who have ranged-combat fetishes. As it is, however, your wimpy subpar War Galleys won't be any match for the enemy Triremes that start popping up later in the game. Before the Iron Age, however, you should use your ships' range advantage to the utmost.

Use the siege units' double hit points to the max--crank these bad boys out whether you're on the offensive or defensive. If you're playing on a map without naval units, the Hittites are hands down the ultimate military power. Strike early and strike fast with them.

Minoan

Bonuses

-30 percent ship cost

+2 Composite Bowman range

+25 percent Farm production

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Legion

Archery: Chariot Archer, Elephant Archer, Horse Archer, Heavy Horse Archer

Cavalry: Chariot, Heavy Cavalry, Cataphract, War Elephant

Towers: Fortification, Guard Tower, Ballista Tower

R&D: Astrology, Mysticism, Afterlife, Fanaticism, Jihad, Monotheism

What Does It All Mean?

If the Minoans had Towers, they'd be the perfect Wonder-building society. But they don't, and consequently they have very little to offer, save a strong, cheap navy. No Elephant units, no powerful Archery Range units, and very little in the way of Priestly upgrades. Their Farm production will allow you to quickly boost your population, and therefore worry less often about your farmers, but as this becomes less important and combat and defense become more important, you'll probably be hosed.

If you are playing as the Minoans, assert yourself on the high seas. If you're playing as part of a team, you should focus on harassing opponents on the seas, and you should situate yourself near one of your teammates, to get under the protective cover of their more effective Towers.

Persian

Bonuses

+30 percent hunting

-30 percent Farm production

War Elephant and Elephant Archer 50 percent faster

+50 percent Trireme fire rate

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Hoplite, Phalanx, Centurion

Archery: Chariot Archer

Cavalry: Chariot

Towers: Ballista Tower

Siegecraft: Ballista, Helepolis, Heavy Catapult

R&D: Artisanship, Plow, Wheel, Aristocracy, Ballistics, Coinage, Craftsmanship, Irrigation, Siegecraft

What Does It All Mean?

Another great warring nation, the Persians can wage some serious war. With War Elephants and Elephant Archers that move and groove 50 percent faster than normal, you can use them instead of horses to get to enemy Catapults. And the 50 percent increase in Trireme fire makes a huge difference on the seas--Persian Triremes get one shot in every second, which essentially means double damage.

So what's missing with this civilization? Ballistics for starters--a huge absence. And the Persians' lack of farming skills means you'll have to pay extra special attention to your farmers, and have plenty more Farms than a normal player has. Don't worry about the lack of Academy units--build multiple Stables all over the place and you'll make up for it.

Even without the Ballista research, the Persians are a great war-going people.

Phoenician

Bonuses

-25 percent War Elephant and Elephant Archer cost
+65 percent Catapult Trireme and Juggernaught fire rate

What You Don't Get

Archery: Horse Archer, Heavy Horse Archer

Cavalry: Heavy Cavalry, Cataphract

Siegecraft: Ballista, Catapult, Heavy Catapult, Helepolis

R&D: Architecture, Chain Mail, Metallurgy, Siegecraft

What Does It All Mean?

Strong in the infantry department, with the ability to build Elephants...at a cheaper rate even? Hmmm...perhaps we've been overlooking the Phoenicians a bit. This is a pretty good group of folks. Their lack of heavy-duty Siege Weapons makes them a bit soft on the attack, but for building and defending a Wonder, they're as good as anybody else. Plus they've got a full-powered navy.

Shang

Bonuses

-30 percent Villager cost
Double wall hit points

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Long Swordsman, Legion, Phalanx, Centurion

Archery: Elephant Archer

Cavalry: War Elephant

Siegecraft: Heavy Catapult

Navy: Trireme, Catapult Trireme, Heavy Transport, Juggernaught

R&D: Alchemy, Aristocracy, Ballistics, Coinage, Engineering, Siegecraft

What Does It All Mean?

Well, these guys aren't very strong on the seas, and they lack the Ballistics improvement, but they can still hold their own, if you play it smart. We see the Shang primarily as a building society--their cheap Villager cost means you can get your society up and running quicker than anyone else. That can be an immediate advantage.

Here's a cool quick-win tactic for the Shang (and Sumerians) we found on [Telcontar's AOE page](#):

This works only on small maps. With the Shang, you can win with a "villager rush." The Shang get three Villagers instead of two, so if you scout with your third Villager and find your opponent soon after the game begins, you can outnumber him by 50 percent and annihilate him.

Avoid the seas, go for the Wonder, and wall yourself in when you're the Shang. It's your best bet.

Sumerian

Bonuses

+15 Villager hit points
+50 percent fire rate for Stone Thrower, Catapult, Heavy Catapult
Double Farm production

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Legion

Archery: Improved Bowman, Composite Bowman, Elephant Archer

Cavalry: Cavalry, Heavy Cavalry, Cataphract

Siege: Ballista, Helepolis

Navy: Merchant ship, Catapult Trireme, Heavy Transport, Juggernaught

R&D: Astrology, Afterlife, Coinage, Craftsmanship, Fanaticism, Iron Shield, Jihad, Metallurgy, Monotheism

What Does It All Mean?

Another building society, the Sumerians are stronger than the Shang, meaning that they can actually get out there and wage war, all the while quietly building their Wonder. Pay no attention to the 15 extra Villager hit points--they're virtually worthless unless you use the cheap quick-win tactic below. More important, though, is the double-Farm-production bonus, a huge deal if you're playing on a waterless inland map.

Take advantage of the Sumerians' increased Catapult firing rate. You can hit your opponents hard with combined squads of Catapults, Academy units such as the Phalanx, and War Elephants.

Here's a cool quick-win tactic for Sumerians (and the Shang) we found on [Telcontar's AOE page](#):

The Sumerian Villagers are as strong as Clubmen, so at the beginning of a game you can keep producing Villagers without building a Barracks and attack before your opponent upgrades or even before he gets Clubmen.

Yamato

Bonuses

-25 percent cost Horse Archers, Scout, Cavalry, Heavy Cavalry, Cataphract
Villagers 30 percent faster
+30 percent hit points for all ships

What You Don't Get

Infantry: Broad Swordsman, Long Swordsman, Legion

Archery: Chariot Archer, Elephant Archer

Cavalry: Chariot, War Elephant

Siegecraft: Ballista, Catapult, Heavy Catapult, Helepolis

Towers: Fortification, Guard Tower, Ballista Tower

R&D: Astrology, Mysticism, Fanaticism, Jihad, Monotheism

What Does It All Mean?

All things considered, the Yamato are pretty good at skirmish warfare, but not so great at defense. Horses are where it's at with

this civilization--Archery unit or Cavalry unit, they're cheap to build! Crank out the Heavy Cavalry units, upgrade to the Cataphracts if you can, and absolutely bury your enemies in the field. When you're attacking towns, move your Cavalry first and take out any Catapults, and then follow up with your Stone Throwers--as long as you keep them away from danger, you'll be golden.

The Yamato's faster Villagers let you crank up your war machine quickly, and that's a good thing. If you can get to the enemy before he gets to you and your lack of Towers, you'll be in great shape.