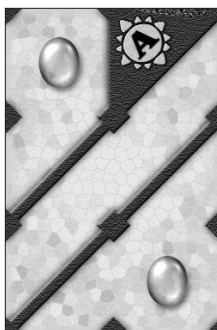# AGORA

A strategy game for 2-4 players
By James Ernest

Welcome to the Agora, the ever-changing Ancient Greek Marketplace. (It's what you're afraid of if you have Agoraphobia.) This game is about constructing shops in a marketplace and trying to make a living.

What You Need: Each player needs several **counters** in a different color. About 20 counters each will suffice, but there is no limit to the number you can use. You also need **a way to keep score**.

Your playing surface should be large and cloth-covered, so that you have plenty of building space and the cards do not slide.

Agora: A Game In Progress

To Begin: Start each player with a score of 10 points, which represents 10 coins. Assign a unique letter to each player, either **A**, **B**, **C**, or **D**. A player's letter has nothing to do with his turn order. It decides which cards will have special effects on that player's turn.

Shuffle the deck and place it face down on the table. To start the marketplace, play one card from the deck face up in the middle of the table. Determine randomly who will go first. Play proceeds to the left.

On Each Turn: Your turn consists of four steps: collecting income, drawing a card, building the market, and (possibly) buying a shop.

Step 1: Income. At the beginning of your turn, you will collect income from all of your existing shops. (On your first turn, your income will be zero.) If your income puts you over 50 coins, you win.

A shop earns one coin for every unbroken section of its perimeter that a customer can walk to, as described in more detail in the diagram at the right. The empty table space is open ground, but cards and the edges of the table are not. A customer can walk to any section of any card that's not blocked by other cards or by the table edge.

Step 2: Draw. Take the top card of the deck. You will play this card in step 3, but first it might have a special effect. If the letter on the card matches your player letter, its effect happens. If it's not your player letter, you skip the effect and move on to step 3. Not accounting for cards that have already been played, there is a 25% chance that a special effect will happen on a given turn.
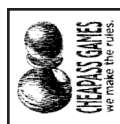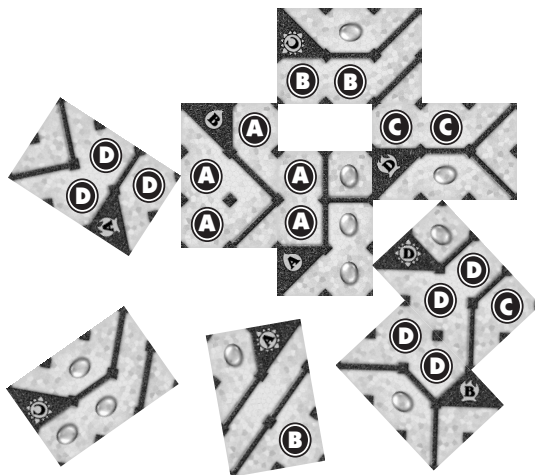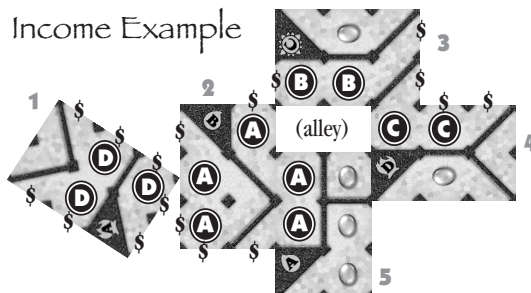
Income Example

Only perimeter segments to which a customer can walk will generate income. Broken segments, i.e., those touched by the corner of another card, do not generate income. Note: You must touch the **white part** of a segment to interfere with it; if you block off only the black part, the segment is still open.

Player A: In this diagram, Player A has shops on cards 2 and 5 with a combined income of 5 coins. The middle segment of the leftmost shop, which is broken by card 1, does not generate income, nor do either of the segments in the alley.

Player B: Player B has one shop on card 3 with an income of 2 coins. As with Player A, the segments in the alley are cut off.

Player C: Player C's shop covers parts of cards 3 and 4, and has an income of 3 coins. C is also losing income to the alley.

Player D: Player D's shops are completely accessible to traffic, and have a combined income of 7 coins. Hurt him!

Special Effects: The three special effects are **Fire**, **Flood**, and **Festival**, marked respectively by a flame, a water drop, and a sun.

Fire: A fire **burns down** the largest shop. For this purpose, the "largest shop" means the shop with the **most counters** in it, not the biggest shop by size or income. Fire **removes from the table** all the cards that are part of that shop, even those cards with no counters on them. This will probably hurt neighboring shops as well, though it might also open up a blind alley.

If there is a tie for largest shop, the Fire has no effect.

Example: In the "game in progress" figure, Player D has the largest shop (in the lower right) with four counters. If there is a Fire now, Player D's shop will burn down, and those cards will leave the table. Note that while Player A has five counters together in the middle, those are actually two unconnected shops of sizes 3 and 2.

Flood: Like a Fire, a Flood also hits the largest shop. However, the Flood just removes all the counters from that shop and leaves the cards on the table.

Floods have no effect on neighboring shops, so in the example above, Player D's counters would be removed from the largest shop, but the cards would remain in play.

As with Fire, if there is a tie for largest shop, a Flood has no effect.


Festival: Festival means that every player earns his **income** again right away. Because this could put more than one player over 50, apply the Festival starting with the active player and proceeding to the left. The **first player** to break 50 coins wins.

Step 3: Build the Market. In Step 3 you will play the card you have drawn. You can play this card at any angle and in any position on the table. It does not have to connect to the existing cards or conform to the same grid pattern as the existing cards. We think this mechanic is really cool. However, there are still some restrictions on building the market:

1: Cards can not overlap.

2: You cannot join shops that are owned by different players.

3: If a new card touches an existing card edge-to-edge, they must share the same grid pattern. Below is an example. Cards that touch only at corners **do not** have to share the same grid.

Edge-to-Edge Connection
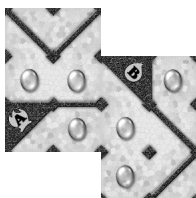
Same Grid (legal)
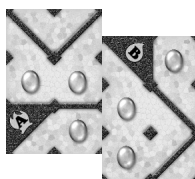
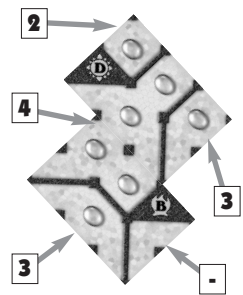**Different Grid (not legal)**

After You Build:

When you enlarge an existing shop, the shop owner immediately expands into the new area for free, by covering all the circles on those new shop elements with his stones. You will often make a play like this to expand your own shop, but you can also do it to block another player's shopfront, or even to make another player's shop bigger and more vulnerable to disaster.

When you play cards near or touching each other, you should make it clear to the other players whether those cards are meant to be touching. Cards may shift in the course of the game, but it's easy to remember whether an alley was supposed to be open or closed.

Step 4: Buy One Shop. Buying a shop is optional, but unless it's close to the end of the game, it usually behooves you to buy something. A "shop" is defined as any complete string of shop pieces, and you can buy any shop that's currently empty, as long as it has space for at least one counter in it. You can't buy a shop with no counter spaces because there is no way to mark it as yours. (Yes, we did that on purpose.)

When you buy a shop, you cover all the circles in the shop with your counters to show that it's yours. Some parts of your shop may not have stones on them, and that's fine. Those segments still belong to you, but they don't count against you for Fires and Floods.

The price of a shop is equal to its present theoretical income, which means that a large shop with few openings will still be cheap. You can buy a shop with no openings for free!

The Price of a Shop

The numbers here represent the current prices of these shops, in coins. The price of a shop is based on a its current open edge spaces, i.e., the money the shop would make if it had income right now. You can't buy the bottom shop because it has no space for a counter.

When you buy a shop, you pay the price of the shop by deducting that amount from your score. If you reach zero coins, you do track your score into the negatives.

Winning: As described above, the winner is the first player to reach 50 coins (or more). Remember that Festivals are scored starting with the active player, so even if a later player would get more money, the first player to break 50 wins.

If you play through the entire deck before anyone goes out, then after the last card is played, the player with the most coins wins.