Mandate of Heaven

You play as the Emperor of China and his or her court of scheming Advisors. While you are the Emperor, your goal is to stay in power as long as possible and forge a glorious legacy, which you do by solving Crises. While you are an Advisor, your goal is to embezzle as much wealth from the Emperor as possible.

Game Setup

Place the following in the center of the table:

- The eight Legacy tokens
- The Monarch deck
- The Resource deck
- The Crisis deck

Deal two Coins to each player, and place the rest in the center as well.

Finally, randomly select a player to start as Emperor, and give them the Emperor reference card. Each other player takes an Advisor reference card.

Start of a Round

Each round begins with the following actions:

1. The Emperor draws Monarch card.
2. The Emperor draws twelve Resource cards, minus three for each time they have been Emperor in a row before this.
3. Each Advisor draws until they have three Crisis cards in front of them, then chooses one to discard.

During a round, players may speak and offer deals to each other in any order. However, it is usually a good idea for the Emperor to begin by asking each Advisor to tell them about one of their Crises and what Resources they need to solve it.

The front face of Monarch and Crisis cards must be kept secret until they are revealed at the end of the round, and Advisors may not reveal the Resource cards in their stockpile.

The Emperor may reveal their hand of Resource cards, if they so choose.

Coins

Crisis Deck

Resource Deck

Monarch Deck

Legacy Tokens

Emperor Reference Card

Advisor Reference Card

Example of Play

Emperor: Caitlin, what would you need to solve your level three Crisis?

Caitlin: Three weapons and two food.

Emperor: Pricey. I'll give you two weapons and two food to solve it right now, or I'm looking elsewhere.

Caitlin: Fine

The Emperor takes the Resources offered and places them on top of the Crisis card in question. The real cost of the Crisis (and therefore how much Caitlin embezzled) will be revealed at the end of the round.

Dealmaking

During the round, the Emperor bargains with their Advisors, offering Resources in exchange for the Advisor using some (or all) of them to solve the Crisis.

Deals are binding. Advisors are not allowed to accept an amount of Resources from the Emperor that is insufficient to solve the Crisis they agreed to solve. Advisors must use Resources they are given on the Crisis they are intended for.
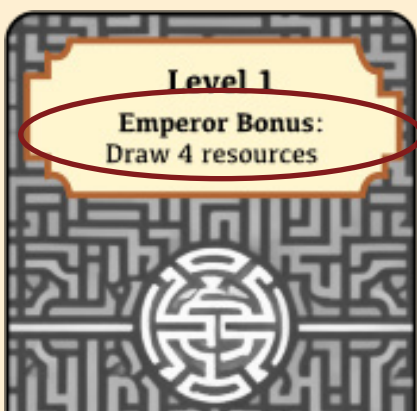
However, Advisors should attempt to bargain for as many Resources as possible—any Resources they receive beyond the requirements to solve the Crisis are worth points for them at the end of the game. Advisors may lie about anything on the face of their Crisis cards.

After a deal is completed, the Crisis is placed face down with the associated Resource cards next to it to indicate it has been solved.
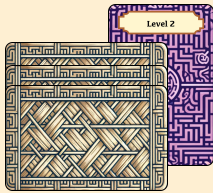
Advisors can also trade the Emperor Resources from their stockpile. Any Resources received from the Emperor in such a trade are placed in the Advisor's stockpile. Players are always allowed to include any Coins they have in a deal, and bribery is encouraged.

Any Emperor bonuses printed on the back face of a Crisis card are public information, and Advisors should ensure the Emperor can see this information. Emperor bonuses are resolved immediately, as soon as the deal to solve the Crisis is complete.

End of the Round

A round ends when the remaining Advisors refuse to make a deal with the Emperor or when the Emperor decrees that the round is over.

The Emperor then reveals their Monarch card. If they complete at least one of the objectives on it, they take a Legacy token. If they complete no objectives or their objective says so, they lose the mandate of heaven: the player to their left becomes the next Emperor.

Each Advisor then reveals the back side of each of their solved Crisis cards and resolves any bonus effects on the front of the card. They discard the Resources indicated and place any remaining Resources the Emperor gave them in their Stockpile (a stack of face-down Resource cards in front of them). They then discard the solved Crisis cards.

Finally, the Emperor discards all their remaining Resource cards (except those in their Stockpile from previous rounds) and their Monarch card.

Roleplay

Players are encouraged to get into character! As an Advisor, the Emperor might pay you more mind if you dramatize your Crises and grovel. As Emperor, your Advisors might get in line if you take on a properly commanding persona. Have fun with it!

Embezzlement

Advisors "embezzle" Resources when they place them in their Stockpile. To do this, an Advisor must have cards left over after paying the costs of all Crisis cards they agreed to solve at the end of the round. Resources used to pay the costs of Crisis cards are discarded.

End of the Game

The game ends when all eight legacy tokens have been claimed. Players then count points to determine the victor. Legacy tokens are worth 7 points and Coins are worth 1 point. Resources in players' Stockpiles are also worth points: 5 for each Weapons card, 4 for each Bricks card, and 3 for each Food card.

The player with the most points wins and should gloat as pompously as possible.

7 points

5 points

4 points

3 points

1 point

Alternate Rules

Betrayal Variant: Advisors can accept insufficient Resources to solve a Crisis. When they do, they may embezzle nothing that round, but the Emperor may be deposed as a result. Legacy tokens are worth 8 points.

3-players: Legacy tokens are worth 8 points. The Emperor draws two fewer Resources, instead of three, for each time they've been Emperor in a row.

5 players: Whenever an Advisor solves a Crisis, they gain 1 Coin. Play with 10 Legacy tokens.

Long game: Play to 12 Legacy tokens.

Finally, look out for our upcoming expansion, which will introduce more Crisis cards with unique effects, secret objectives for Advisors, Character cards with special powers, and much more!

How-to-Play Video

About Us

Mandate of Heaven was created by Seamus Allen, Caitlin Kunchur, Logan Schreier, and Alexander Worley for CS247G at Stanford University.

Caitlin Kunchur provided the graphic design for the components, and the rulebook was created by Seamus Allen. All images were generated with AI.