

DEATHMATCH IN AGE OF EMPIRES II

A Beginners Guide

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1 Introduction

This guide targets players who are new or inexperienced in the DeathMatch (DM) game-mode of Age of Empires II. The goal is to give the reader an extensive overview of all stages in a 1v1 DM game and a rough outline for starting builds for each and every civilisation (civ). Throughout this guide you may find images to illustrate certain points, as well as examples from certain tournament games. There will also be a bias in the way I present particular aspects to the reader stemming from my own preferences and play-style. Although I attempt to elucidate on different approaches, I limit this guide to one build order per civ which I deem to be the most popular. I encourage the reader to try different stuff themselves over time and find their right approach to the game.

The layout of the guide and how particular readers may approach it depending on their experience is as follows. For a completely new player to AoE2:DE, I believe all of the material presented in this guide can be of service to you. However, it may be wise to first begin with section 8 followed by sections 4,6 and 7. For a player who has some experience in AoE2:DE but not DM, I instead recommend beginning with sections 5 and 6 with some attention paid to section 4.

Before I dive into the subject I also want to thank [QuEnDi]True for editing and helping with this guide and furthermore for his many contributions in the DM-Community!

2 Resources for Improving

Guides that helped me in this endeavor and other resources:

- DM Tutorial-1 -How to play the first 4 minutes- by TheCode
Link
- Videoguides by uNLeAsHeD
Link
- Tutorial-Playlist by Joro
Link
- Training and other stuff by KD aka SpoolyGaming
Link
- Introductory videos by ImComing
Link

3 What is DM and why do people play it?

1v1 DM is usually played with the following settings:

- Game : Death Match
- Size : Tiny (2 player)
- Difficulty : Standard
- Population : 200
- Game Speed : Fast
- Reveal Map : Explored
- Starting Age : Post-Imperial
- Victory Condition : Conquest

The aim of a Deathmatch (DM) game is a fast paced, action packed game. Starting in Post-Imperial grants the player all the techs available to the civilization that they are playing, thus leading to unusual combinations that you would not normally see in a standard Random Map (RM) game. Practiced enough, DM will improve your map awareness, late game capabilities and mechanics. I myself started out in RM, where I found myself struggling a lot from late castle age onwards, oftentimes because I would seldomly reach that stage. Some time after I was introduced to DM, I went back to RM. I felt relaxed and confident when going into the late game and won a lot of games I would not have prior to playing DM. I also started DM, because during that time, the most common RM playstyle was Drush-Wall-FC, which I found to be quite boring. DM games, where the action started immediately, and could last anywhere from 10-90 mins, seemed more appealing to me at that time.

3.1 The Classics

3.1.1 Frank Wars

Frank Wars have been a staple in the DM world since the Age of Kings in 1999. You will still see a lot of players specialising in them, old players coming back and new players starting to love them. This civilization has essentially everything to offer in terms of DM gameplay. A fast start with their paladins, strong units and a counter triangle of Paladins, Axemen and Halberdiers that make for a very interesting micro-intensive mid-game. A huge reliance on relics in late-game and

fast but delicate economy management throughout the game puts a lot of demand on the players. You may even come across players who want to play according to “Zone rules”, which is basically a gentleman’s agreement of limiting themselves to a maximum of five trebuchets, no units from the siege workshop, and no more than 40 Axemen at a time.

3.1.2 Hun Wars

Basically the Franks of the Conquerors expansion. Their no house bonus grants them a very fast start, combined with their lack of heavy siege it gives you very dynamic and exciting games. It is one of the settings, which players specialised the most in over the years.

4 Mechanics

4.1 The importance of hotkeys

If you don’t use hotkeys yet, you should start using them now. With the introduction of AoE2:DE players were introduced to a few more options on how to approach the game mechanically. It should be emphasized, that hotkeys are a highly personal thing. Do and use what is comfortable to you and edit your hotkey-files accordingly.

4.2 Building selection and unit production

For the initial building placement and other tasks queuing up actions by holding shift while tasking villagers is very useful. It is crucial to reduce walking and idle time by villagers.¹

If you select all buildings of a certain type and produce units, their production will spread out accordingly in all the selected buildings, this behavior is known as multiqueue (MQ) . Now there are multiple ways to select your buildings:

1. Scroll to your desired buildings, select them all by double-clicking them and produce the units that you want.
2. Select your military buildings and put them on a number by pressing Ctrl+whatever number you deem to fit. Pressing that number again will select those buildings for you. You can add buildings to your already existing control-group by holding shift and deselect certain buildings by holding the Ctrl-key.

¹Spring explains this quite well in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PcDcGCiCAY>



Figure 1: Hotkey-Editor in DE settings, you can make multiple hk profiles to try different things out

3. The new option in DE are the 'Select all buildings' hotkeys. Which selects all buildings of a certain type; an option, that a lot of DM players like to use. On the plus side these are basically better go-to-hotkeys and you do not need to bother about numbering your buildings. On the other hand it will select all buildings around the map, which will produce units at places, where you do not necessarily need them.
4. You can also use go-to-hotkeys to cycle through your buildings, which is an antiquated and honestly ineffective way of doing things, since the introduction of a properly working MQ.

5 Stages of a DM game

5.1 The Start 0-10 mins (a fight for position)

One of the most extensive write-ups on this has been done by TheCode in the post mentioned under section 2. In this section I will try to summarise the most important parts in my own way, but I want to encourage the reader to go through the full post linked above as well. Some of it might be outdated, other things

still hold true to this day. Some more detail for starts will also be given in the civ-specific section.

5.1.1 Step 1 - Early start:

First, you are thrown into the game. What you see is your Town Center (TC), surrounded by three villagers and your starting scout cavalry. First step is to queue 15 villagers in your Town Center. For the second step players already deviate in their approach. Some will build a house and a military building first and then send their scout to the enemy's base. Others will send their scout first and then build their buildings. On short distances a fast scout can win games, late buildings can also lose them though - so be careful in your choice. Also: Do not forget to put your scout on aggressive stance! Two villagers on your first building and one on a house is usual nowadays. Although one villager on two initial military buildings can be seen with some civs, it is risky for others. This is followed by the foundations of the buildings the initial villagers should go to afterwards.

5.1.2 Step 2 - The 4th villager:

This woman or man is usually first rallied to the starting buildings and then has the task to lay the rest of your foundations according to you civ. Do not try to rush this part, keep one tile between your buildings to ensure your units are getting out efficiently later and have a look at the minimap occasionally to see if your scout has reached the opponent's base yet.

This is also the time to look at the layout of the map, key gold positions and hills especially, and base your game approach accordingly. The new minimap setting on DE can help here.

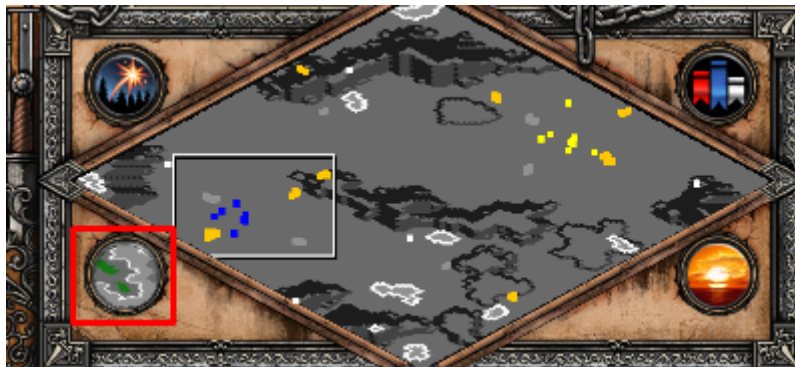


Figure 2: Setting specialised on pointing out hills and golds on the map

The following villagers should always be building only one structure at a time, this

is the most efficient way to get up as many buildings as possible in the shortest timespan. You also want to reduce the idle time of your villagers. Always keep them working and always keep them separate.

5.1.3 Step 3 - The rush:

Sending your early units to the other player's base is called rushing in the DM-Community. And this can already make or break a game. To do that successfully you need to rally your first 4-6 units (usually only done if you start with cavalry) in different positions slightly behind the enemy's base. The first unit stays at your base to defend from your enemy's starting scout. The first two units approaching the enemy are not necessarily there to kill villas yet, but to draw defending units from the opponents base, the 2-3 units following up have now more breathing room to kill villas.

But why do we rush, and why stop so early?

Four minutes into the game, when the initial build is usually done and players move out on the map and build up their early economy, you normally have twelve villagers at your disposal. That means seven TCs, two forward castles on the map, one villager building monasteries, one building siege workshops and one villager already mining gold. Now if you lose three villas to a rush you have 25% less villagers and thus less potential moving out on the map, or for an early eco than the other player, giving the initiative to your opponent. Additionally delaying villagers at the start will slow down your build up significantly and thus reduce your military output early on and therefore giving the opponent the upper hand as well.

The danger of rushing too much is, that you throw away too many precious units, which may give you a significant disadvantage in the first fights, if you do not inflict too much damage with them.

5.1.4 Step 4 - Defending from a rush:

Now what can you do to not be behind massively after three minutes in-game time? There are three main options for saving villas: Having your units protect them, garrisoning them and walling them in.

- Preemptively garrison your villagers

This is especially helpful against the starting hussar/scout. Depending on the direction it is coming from or it is going to, you can try to preemptively garrison your villager. Now with the new and better hussar and sometimes dodgy pathfinding, garrisoning a villager, that just started to be attacked, can already be too late.

- Fighting the rusher

Against weaker starting scouts you can also try and fight it for a bit before garrisoning your builder, until your first defensive military unit comes in to help. TaToH liked to do this a lot in DMWC 3. Also viable with spanish and incan villagers. Having your units accumulate in your base at their buildings initially (after your first rushing units) can help in cluttering up your base and make it harder for the rusher. As a more advanced step you could try and rally your buildings where you think the units will come in, but that should not be too far on top of your priority list. Additionally, even if you plan to open with champions with for example vikings, the first unit is usually a pikeman to kill the scout of the opponent more easily.

- Walling your workers

By strategically placing your buildings preemptively and walling in your villagers you can save them from certain death. Here are some pictures how to do that.



Figure 3: The first few vills. Start close to TC and build outwards in circles



Figure 4: Notice how villagers are evenly spread out and some are walled in. Arrows are marking angles of attack.



Figure 5: Defensive build-up of TheCode in DMWC 3 Loser's Bracket Final Maya war

5.1.5 Step 5 - Early economy and expansion:

When you are done with most houses and military buildings, it is time for TCs and expansion on the map. Normally players go for two TCs at their main gold, plus a defensive castle there aswell. Then a couple of TCs on wood and stone, or purely for farms. It really depends on what civ you are playing and what compositions you go for. If you go for six additional TCs and fully queue them all, including your starting TC, you are already at 100+ vills, which is quite a decent economy. Of course it is not always wise to full out eco from the start, but a lot of beginners are very lazy on economy and mass a one time army, that can never be replenished. So you might be better of overdoing it and just deleting villagers, if you have too many.

This is also the time to move out with your army and take key positions on the map. Do not forget: With a good start comes the initiative, freedom of choice on what to do and a nice amount of army, that will always deal a sufficient amount of damage to your enemy. While you can savely concentrate on other stuff, like expanding/relics and eco, you do not have to pay attention to you army like a hawk, while it is moving outward.

Furthermore, if you gain ground, CLAIM IT! By building a siege workshop/castle or some other defensive structure. If you get pushed back it will take some time for your enemy to gain ground in return, making it easier for you to push into another direction or on another key point of the map, or lets you amass another army to push back eventually.

5.2 Winning conditions

5.2.1 A good start

A good rush, build and gameplan can win or lose you games in under ten minutes. If you are just starting out and take the advices above to heart, then you will experience a rapid grow in rating and your games will be on the shorter side for a while. But even on higher levels starts are crucial to get an early edge over the opponent, eg. by taking a very important hill on the map and carrying that to victory.

5.2.2 Market

Until now I have not talked much about the market dynamics in the game, because it adds another layer on top off it all. Sometimes an early market and selling food, wood (and sometimes even stone) for gold can give you a huge advantage in the early game by setting back your economy in the midgame. It can be used to get

a quick win or for taking a key position on the map. If nobody goes for an early market, selling excess resources once gold starts to run out with a good eco to back it up, can be game deciding and may give you the edge you need to close out the game.

5.2.3 Gold

On most standard maps there are three gold piles per player (1x7 tiles and 2x4 tiles) and two “neutral” gold piles with 3 tiles each. Normally getting both of those neutral gold piles means a win, if you do not have to sacrifice too much to get them. Also denying one of the main golds of your enemy, will usually give you a huge edge.

5.2.4 Why is gold so important?

Gold units are the most population effective units in the game, they are usually preferred to their trash counterparts until gold runs out, with the exception of halberdiers. For a lot of civs having access to gold also means having access to trash killers like Japanese and their samurai/champions or celts and their woad raiders. Secondly siege units need gold to produce and without them you are going to struggle pushing your opponent and getting their buildings down. Which brings us to the next big factor for winning games: Relics!

5.2.5 Relics

For some civilisations relics are more important than for others (Aztecs and Lithuanians come to mind). It is save to say that regardless of the civ, a 4-1 or even 5-0 lead in terms of relics gives you a huge edge over your opponent. One more onager, ram or treb in a late imp trash fight, can mean that you trade way more cost effectively in the long run and have to spend less resources in total. Or think of it this way: One relic gives you one gold per two seconds in-game time. That means the player with four relics can afford one ram for roughly every 38 seconds in-game time, while the player with one relic has to wait about 150 seconds to make one. For civilisations with good champions or Infantry UU (Goths, Aztecs etc.) a 4-1 or 5-0 relic advantage may result in a champions/UU vs trash war with the expected result.

To further my point about the importance and power of gold units I will reference TheCode again:

I think the main point Christ emphasizes, as Fall explained a bit more, is not how you should always fight pure palas vs halberdiers, it is rather

about the power of ultimate strong gold army built with a solid eco. When/if you can achieve that, pala vs halb cost effectivity issue becomes an irrelevant discussion, especially in a tg. As long as you build a strong gold army, you do win most of your fights, even if you lose some of them vs trash units, the damage is almost completely recoverable. You can always push and can dominate map control with solid armies, whereas with thrash units all you can do is win a few fights cost effectively, which pretty much means nothing most of the time for a decent post-imperial game. The main message there I think that some of the time, of course not in very high level games, RMers tend to avoid such fights just to be cost effective, eventhough the fight would allow them to have a strong gain in many other perspectives. It is also understandable that what is suggested is a debatable issue and can be hard to implement or judge how to be used and requires alot of practice to be perfectly employed. Even in the DM, where post imperial is all that there is, it was after many years of AOC, this strategy evolved to be one of the finest and most decent one by the contribution of many players.

For the 80 farms issue, I am not very experienced in early-imp RM, but from DM point of view, this strategy can also have a lot of effect in 1vs1 late-post imperial games. We have experienced, more than enough, that for those civs that can create cheap gold units, it is most of the time effective to use them instead of thrash units. For example, in a viking, celt, teuton etc 1v1s, where gold is finished, you can mass berserkers, woad raiders or TKs of 60-70 by selling food, instead of 120-130 trash units of sc,halb and skirm. ²

5.2.6 Economy

This is where a lot of players starting out lose their games, even though their start and unit control may be better and they win early fights. If you do not invest early enough into a strong economy (without totally ignoring army of course) you are on a timer to win the game, because eventually the opponent with the superior economy will just outproduce and overwhelm you.

²<https://www.aoezone.net/threads/imperial-age-tips-secrets.115725/page-3#post-442322>

5.2.7 Wood

If noone has gained an edge until gold runs dry, the last resource on the map to fight for is wood. And it can be quite a precious resource sooner than one might expect. Dominating the map in this case is the way to go and slowly pushing your advantages. Having control of three of the four corners on the map in these instances usually translates to a win in the long run.

5.3 Midgame 10-35 mins (a fight for gold)

The midgame is all about gaining and maintaining control over the golds, while keeping the fights as efficient as possible. Powerful gold armies and optimised eco dominate this phase of the game. Of course there are different approaches to the midgame aswell. Some will go for a very powerful gold army with a minimalistic economy, that will be hard to replenish but also hard to beat, while others will rely on mass production, while maintaining a larger economy. It is a balancing act in this phase of the game. Depending on the civ and how you play you need to adjust your eco in this phase of the game. Ideally you want to aim for 75-120 villagers depending on your civilisation. It is hard to make general rules here, as it depends a lot on the dynamic of the game and how you decide to play it. I will try to give some rough categorization of low-mid- and heavy eco civilisations.

Do not take these as gospel, but more as a suggestion. As you learn more you will see yourself how different approaches and civilisations work out. The crucial point is: There cannot be a guide out there that will make you really good instantly, you have to put in the hours to gain experience. Playtime is necessary, not sufficient. It would be like expecting muscle growth from reading a guide about how to train correctly in the gym. Anyway here it goes:

Low economy:

Britons, Chinese, Italians, Japanese, Mayans, Portuguese

Moderate Economy

Berbers, Burmese, Ethiopians, Huns, Inca, Indians, Koreans, Magyar, Malay, Mongols, Saracens, Spanish, Tartars, Teutons, Turks, Vietnamese, Vikings

Heavy/Fast economy (Generally food heavy civs)

Aztecs, Bulgarians, Celts, Cumans, Goths, Khmer, Lithuanians, Malians, Persians, Slavs

5.4 Lategame 35mins-1:30hr+ (a fight for ground)

Gold is running out and it is time to be very careful with your gold units and make a transition to trash units (or very low gold units like champions) and siege. Some make that transition earlier than others depending on their eco or playstyle. While specific players will save their gold and go for full trash while still having 1k gold in the bank, others will go for the most cost efficient combination until the last moment to make the switch. You should aim for 100+ villas for almost all civilisations. For heavy hussar civilisations you should aim for 80+ farms in this stage of the game (Mongols, Saracens, Turks, Berbers etc). If a lot of castles are still up at this stage, raiding may not be desired, but strategical pushes with trash and siege armies. Trebuchets can be used to force fights and the aim is to get most of the map-control and taking out the castles and eco of the opponent. Focus on maintaining 200 population and a good running eco, while pushing for ground.

5.5 Super Lategame (a fight for wood)

Wood units get replaced by purely food or food and low gold units. Champions, similar units and hussars dominate this stage of the game. Stone is now a crucial resource to secure woodlines and corners with either castles, towers or TCs and it is desirable to save up stone, if possible, throughout the game for exactly this stage. Protect your relics well and if all wood runs out you might wanna think about monks ;). Cost efficiency is key at this point and the player with more wood will win eventually.

6 Civilizations and their starts

For civboni and tech trees look here: <https://aoe2techtrees.net>

Disclaimer: These openings are not to be understood as dogma. It is what I have seen the most and what I consider solid low risk openings. Feel free to experiment with different openings and approaches on your own and find out what suits you best and watch what other players do in a given situation. If there is no special focus added it means standard winning conditions apply. If there is no number before the specific building name then I do not recommend focusing on building these specific structures in your initial base, although I will not stop you from making them early. General rule: The more buildings you start out with, the quicker you will run out of resources and the quicker your eco needs to be, that's why players limit themselves on buildings early on. I also do not recommend making more than four castles around your initial Town Center, as that will hurt your expansion on the map.



- **Aztecs**

- Buildings: 4-6 barracks, 4 castles, siege workshops
- Units: eagles for rush followed by champs, jaguar warriors, heavy siege.
- Special Focus: relics and food eco
- Tips: -



- **Berbers**

- Buildings: 6-7 stables, 4 castles, barracks if you feel like it
- Units: camels/hussars, camel archers, pikemen
- Special Focus: cheap camels, raidings and map control.
- Tips: Usually low eco for quite a long time due to cheap and lost lasting units. transitions into very farm heavy lategame with hussar spam. (80+farms)



- **Britons**

- Buildings: 4 barracks, 4-6 ranges, 4 castles, siege workshops
- Units: champions, arbalests, longbowmen, rams
- Special Focus: rams and trebuchets
- Tips: Do not overinvest in eco early



- **Bulgarians**

- Buildings: 3 stables, 4-6 barracks, 4+ kreposts, siege workshops
- Units: cavalier, two handed swordsmen/halberdiers, konniks, heavy siege
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: Don't waste too much army early. Needs eco faster than one might expect
A lot of approaches are possible with Bulgarians. I have seen pure Krepost openings, Cav+HCA openings, the one described here. This civ lends itself to many different approaches which makes it quite unique.



- **Burmese**

- Buildings: 4-5 stables, 3-4 barracks, 4-5 siege workshops, 3-4 castles
- Units: elephants, halberdiers, scorps/onagers/bbc, arambai
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: -



- **Byzantines**

- Buildings: 4 stables, 5 barracks, 6 ranges, castles/workshops
- Units: paladins, halberdiers, arbalests, cataphracts, siege rams
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: -



- **Celts**

- Buildings: 3 stables, 4 barracks, 4-6 siege workshops, castles
- Units: paladins, halberdiers/champions, every siege unit, woad raiders
- Special Focus: Early eco, do not underestimate the importance of siege
- Tips: Make farms early



- **Chinese**

- Buildings: 4 stables, 4 barracks, 4 castles, 4 siege workshops
- Units: heavy camels, halberdiers, chu-ko-nus, onagers
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: mass UU+onager kill everything, heavy on wood though



- **Cumans**

- Buildings: 3-5 stables, 3-4 castles, 4-6 barracks, siege workshops
- Units: steppe lancers for raids/paladins, kipchaks, halberdiers, siege onagers
- Special Focus: Early rush can be deadly but you can also easily over-invest into lancers early, which can lose you the game. Heavy eco
- Tips: -



- **Ethiopians**

- Buildings: 2 stables, 3 barracks, 6 ranges, 5 siege workshops, castles
- Units: heavy camels, halberdiers, arbalests, heavy siege, shotel warriors
- Special Focus: sniping and maintaining siege, relics for UU
- Tips: everything dies quickly



- **Franks**

- Buildings: 6 stables, 4 barracks, 4 castles
- Units: paladins, halberdiers, throwing axemen
- Special Focus: rush, relics, food eco
- Tips: -



- **Goths**

- Buildings: 5 barracks, HOUSES, 4 workshops
- Units: Huskarls for rush then champions, scorps and bbc
- Special Focus: Rush, Food eco, relics
- Tips: Castles for defense before TCs, you dont want to have more than 2-3 villas on your barracks since you will be pop capped heavily, if not enough villas are making houses.



- **Huns**

- Buildings: 4 stables, 6 barracks, 6 ranges
- Units: paladins, halberdiers, HCA and siege rams
- Special Focus: Rush, siege rams, market
- Tips: Tarkans in the beginning can be quite useful to rush and defend from a rush since they produce quicker than paladins



- **Inca**

- Buildings: 6-7 ranges, 5 siege workshops, 3-4 castles
- Units: slingers, onagers and rams, kamayuks
- Special Focus: Towers and siege
- Tips: -



- **Indians**

- Buildings: 6 stables, 4 barracks, 4 castles
- Units: imperial camel, halberdiers, elephant archer
- Special Focus: Early food eco
- Tips: -



- **Italians**

- Buildings: 5 barracks, 6 ranges
- Units: condottierros, arbalests, onagers
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: -



- **Japanese**

- Buildings: 0-2 barracks, 6-7 ranges
- Units: halberdiers, HCA, samurai
- Special Focus: Yasama towers and trebs
- Tips: -



- **Khmer**

- Buildings: 5 stables, 6 siege workshops
- Units: battle elephants, heavy scorpions
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: Its hard to retreat with scorps, take care of them



- **Koreans**

- Buildings: 4-5 barracks, 4 castles, 5 siege workshops
- Units: champions, war wagons, siege onager
- Special Focus: Heavy early wood eco, late farms
- Tips: -



- **Lithuanians**

- Buildings: 4 stables, 5 barracks, 5 ranges, later castles
- Units: paladins, halberdiers, HCA, leitis
- Special Focus: Relics for additional attack on cavalry
- Tips: -



- **Magyars**

- Buildings: 4 stables, 4 barracks, 7 ranges
- Units: paladins, halberdiers, HCA, magyar huszar
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: Do not make hussar, magyar huszar is always better



- **Malay**

- Buildings: 4-6 barracks, 5-7 ranges, later castles
- Units: halberdiers, arbalests, siege, karambit warriors
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: -



- **Malian**

- Buildings: 5 stables, 4 castles, 4 siege workshops
- Units: heavy camels, gbetos, siege onager, bbc
- Special Focus: Units die quickly
- Tips: Raiding and rush is less effective due to their TC bonus. Good towers



- **Mayans**

- Buildings: 4-6 barracks, 4 castles, siege workshops
- Units: eagles, plumed archers, rams rams and rams
- Special Focus: Market, no farm until 40-50 mins into the game, low eco
- Tips: -



- **Mongols**

- Buildings: 6 stables, 4 castles, 4 siege workshops
- Units: heavy camels/hussars, mangudai, siege onager and rams
- Special Focus: very food heavy lategame with hussars being dominant
- Tips: Not enough camels at the start can lose you ground very fast, too many camels and late hussar switch will hurt your mangudai numbers significantly early on.



- **Persians**

- Buildings: 3 stables, 5 barracks, 4-5 siege workshops, 3-4 castles (monasteries)
- Units: paladins, halberdiers, scorpions and bbc, war elephants (monks)
- Special Focus: Heavy early food eco.
- Tips: -



- **Portuguese**

- Buildings: 3 stables, 4 barracks, 5 ranges, castles, siege workshops
- Units: cavalier, halberdiers, arbalests, organ guns, lots of bbcs and some onagers
- Special Focus: Bombardcannons
- Tips: The one with more bbcs tends to win battles, organ guns melt to them



- **Saracens**

- Buildings: 6 stables, 4-5 barracks, castles, Siege workshops
- Units: heavy camels, pikemen, siege onager, elite mameluke
- Special Focus: Market, food heavy lategame
- Tips: -



- **Slavs**

- Buildings: 6 barracks, 5 siege workshops, castles
- Units: champions/halberdiers, siege, boyars
- Special Focus: food eco
- Tips: no houses early on due to teambonus



- **Spanish**

- Buildings: 4 stables, 4 barracks, 4 castles
- Units: paladins, halberdiers, conquistadors
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: Hard to rush due to strong villagers. Very lategame raiding is less effective than with other civs



- **Tartars**

- Buildings: 4 stables, 3-4 barracks, 7 ranges, castles
- Units: heavy camels, halberdiers, HCA, keshiks
- Special Focus: HCA numbers
- Tips: Very weak halberdiers, starts without barracks are possible.



- **Teutons**

- Buildings: 3 stables, 5 barracks, 4 castles, siege workshops
- Units: paladins, halberdiers, teutonic knights, siege onager
- Special Focus: food eco
- Tips: Top players have started only using barracks at the start and no stables. Saves a lot of gold for some mobility in the early game



- **Turks**

- Buildings: 4-6 stables, 5-7 range, siege workshops
- Units: heavy camels/hussar, HCA, siege rams
- Special Focus: Market, Rams
- Tips: Not enough camels at the start can lose you ground very fast, too many camels and late hussar switch will hurt your gold count



- **Vietnamese**

- Buildings: 4-5 stables, 4 barracks, 4 castles, ranges
- Units: battle elephants, halberdiers, rattan archers, imperial skirmishers, onagers
- Special Focus: -
- Tips: -



- **Vikings**

- Buildings: 4 barracks, 5-6 ranges, castles, siege workshops
- Units: champions, arbalests, berzerkers, onagers and rams
- Special Focus: Relics
- Tips: -



7 Army Control

7.1 Unit stances

- Offensive
Units will attack the opponent on sight and follow until either out of sight or they themselves or the targeted units die. If one building in their reach gets attacked (eg. castle getting shot by a trebuchet) units will move out to attack the trebuchet. This way you can lure out enemy units and potentially also lose a lot of units yourself needlessly.
- Defensive
Units will only follow the enemy to a certain extend until they return to their original position, and will not attack in this stance if a castle gets attacked from the distance.
- Stand Ground
Units will only attack units in reach, will not follow and attack back when they get attacked. A lot of players will leave their ranged units on stand ground to prevent them from running into their death.
- No attack
Self explanatory. Almost never used.

7.2 Formations



- Line
Standard formation, cannot do much wrong by using it
- Box
pretty useless for DM
- Staggered
Often used to get more units to engage at the same time by providing a bigger

surface area of attack. You will see a lot of players patrolling in staggered formation around the map. Also useful for mass onager fights, to prevent your siege units from clumping up too much.

- Flank
Exclusively used for dodging onager shots or similar. Pressing this button will split your army in two equal groups, timed correctly you can dodge the enemy's siege.

7.3 Other Controls

- Patrol and Attack Move
Most players send their units into the battle by patrolling their army. If units do not engage while reaching the point they have been sent to, they will go back and forth between that point and the starting point. Attack move got introduced with HD and carried over to DE. Units will stop at the location they have been sent to, it often acts/used to act buggy though, and most players are just used to engaging with patrol.
- Attack Ground
Onagers get way more deadly with some micro and the attack ground hotkey, that enables you to shoot at a specific place of your desire. You can catch units running by or towards you off guard with that quite often.
- Alt-Click
With the July 2020 patch AoE2:DE got a feature, that was originally introduced in the Userpatch for the original game. By pressing the Alt-key and right clicking the units on a field of farms, the usual attack command will be overwritten by a move command, this enables you to walk freely with your military on farms. Same goes for units obstructed by buildings, these can be targeted more easily now, pressing alt while right clicking on them. Especially useful for targeting enemy villagers building a castle.

8 How to learn - A guide for improvement

8.1 Play, play and play!

To be really good at basically everything in live you need to practice A LOT. Now that does not mean that you will automatically get good by just playing the game. The point is, that playing a lot of games may not be sufficient, but necessary to get to the top.

8.2 Doing things right from the beginning

Once a thing is learned, it can be quite hard to unlearn again. Eg. starting out in DM I never bothered about relics much, and even now, when I am focusing on it, I still sometimes miss to make a monastery if I just play my usual game. Because I did not include it from the beginning my brain seems hardwired over hundreds of games to prioritise other areas at the start of the game. Unlearning a wrong habit and forming a new one is one of the toughest things in getting to the next level, thus doing things right from the start should be at the top of your priority list.

8.3 Do not compromise

If you see an expert player hit 85+ population with Huns at four minutes, you should not be satisfied with 70 or 75 for that matter. You should aim for the same, if not better. Try to hit those benchmarks, that you set yourself, by watching the best do it. If you see an expert player having 1k gold collected by minute ten, do not be happy with your measly 500, try to do the same. First try it against an allied AI and see if you can replicate it with no pressure. Next against a non-allied AI for some pressure and after that you can try it in a real game and be hard on yourself (within reason) to hit the marks you set yourself when reviewing your games afterwards. Once you are able to do that, the top players do not seem like an unreachable entity anymore. They have been where you are now and so you can get into their territory as well.

8.4 Focus/Dedicated Practice

What is better than just playing the game a lot? Playing the game a lot with a plan in your head. Two hours of effective dedicated practice are better than mindlessly playing on for five hours. What do I mean by dedicated practice? Dedicated practice can either be done by playing on the ladder or with a training partner and means focusing on one aspect of your game for a session. Ideally it should focus on an aspect of your game that you feel weak in. For example: By reviewing your own games you notice, that you constantly fall behind in army, because you forget to produce units. Now for your next practice sessions your focus should be on producing units primarily, until you are satisfied with your results. But what should you focus on first?

8.5 Step by step

Your focused practice should orientate itself on the basics and the win conditions. Those are in my opinion as follows:

- Efficient start
- Rush
- Unit Production
- Relics
- Gold income
- Expansion on the map
- Villager production
- Villager idle time

8.6 Hitting a wall: breaks and back to basics

On your way to becoming better there will be a couple of times where you will feel like you hit a wall or are even regressing in your skill, when trying to incorporate something new. That is completely normal. If you would map your progress on a 2D-graph then it would look like a steep upward progression in the beginning followed by a curve that goes up and down over and over again, but trends upwards ever so slightly on average. For me personally a big step up in skill was most of the time preceded by losing streaks of up to -10. Getting over these hurdles is one of the toughest things on the road to success and depending on you as a person can influence your mood in the offline world aswell. In that case try to break the rhythm by either taking a few days off and getting back into it with a fresh mindset, maybe play some different settings, some RM, maybe some casual teamgames. Another approach for hitting the wall is going back to the basics. Very often when concentrating on integrating new stuff, it tends to happen, that you get sloppy with the already learned basics, even if you might not notice it. Going back to those basics every now and then can also provide you with a fresh mindset and gives you security at the start of the game.

8.7 Training partners

Training partners allow you to have more focused training sessions. For example ladder games do not allow you to grind the start over and over again in repeated 4-6 min games or with the same (non-) standard settings every time. The most suitable practice partner should ideally be around your skill level, maybe even a little bit better than you. It is neither good practice nor motivating if you get crushed in five minutes in every game. On the other hand it is also not ideal practice, if you can basically do whatever you want in a game and still edge out a win.

If you cannot find a suitable training partner then the standard DE AI or the Barbarian AI are your best friends to get build orders, mechanics and basics down. Do not get used to them too much though, since the dynamic of a human vs human game is way more diverse and fundamentally different. You might develop bad habits, by getting used to AI too much, that will hurt you in the long run.

8.8 One tricking

Although looked down upon quite a lot, one tricking can help immensely getting started. Focusing on the basics like start, rush, mechanics and relics, without having to think about what units to make every game over and over again, especially now, that there are more than 30 civs, can be very useful. After a certain time you should definitely broaden your horizon, since you do not want to get stuck in your ways too much.

8.9 Rating

Rating can both be a great incentivising and decentivising tool for improvement, depending on your approach. I generally advice you to take rating as only a peripheral indicator of improving someones skill. Depending on who you play against and what you are trying out your overallly ability could increase while you lose rating and vice versa. Same goes for losing and winning a game. More important should be your ingame performance and if you make progress in the areas you are focusing on. The rating will come by itself over time. It is also important to acknowledge that the rating system is primarily not a measurement of skill, but perfomance and performance can be influenced by many factors, like alerteness, fatigue, mood and various other things. Depending on the day and the opponents you are getting matched against, your rating can fluctuate highly in a very short time. Even though your skill may be the exact same, because your rating is always measured in relation to others.

9 General Tips

9.1 Know your priorities and attention management

This comes a lot with practice, but I recommend specifically reflecting on this part of the game. In an RTS (Real Time Strategy) game like AoE2 attention is a limited resource like any other in the game and has to be spent cautiously and not without thought. A difference in playstyle and strength between players often comes down to the amount of attention one can spend and how it is spent in the first place. Have you ever wondered how TheViper can micro in two fights simultaneously, while responding to twitch chat and developing a game plan? Because through years of practice and repetition he knows how to spend his attention efficiently. That also includes having a cycle of repeated actions. This could look something like this:

1. Produce villagers
2. Look at army
3. Look at resources
4. Produce army
5. Look at the minimap
6. Check for idle villagers
7. Repeat (with various other actions sprinkled in between, depending on demand)

As a general rule you should always disengage your army, before managing your base or eco heavily. I see it happening again and again, that players run their army into the fog of war or the opponents base and just look away. Once you know the fight is even or sure you going to win, you can also safely look for other stuff to do. On the other hand you do not want to be glued to your army either and not do economy at all. It is again a balancing act and you have players who are more army/micro heavy and players who are more eco/macro heavy in their attention spending.

9.2 Use the minimap

You should definitely make it a habit to have a glance at the minimap every few seconds to see if there are units approaching or are in your base already. Especially if you are making a move that will require a lot of attention (fight, attacking move)

you should always take a moment to have a quick look at the minimap, because while you might be winning an engagement in the front, you can lose 40 villagers at home losing you the war.

9.3 Solidify your position and slow down the opponent

This has already been hinted upon before. If you have gained ground, claim it! Be it a castle/towers or any other structure. It is also recommended to put siege workshops in front of your castle, because that will make it harder for the opponent to push in there. Secondly always have villagers ready nearby to repair a castle under siege. Repairing for a while can enable you to get a bombard cannon or onager out to take their siege out, or getting enough army ready to push back.

9.4 How to push an opponent/Show some patience

If you know you have an advantage or you feel like you are going to have one, have siege ready! Nothing is worse than being 200/200 pop against 150/200 with no siege to push fortifications with. Rams and onagers can be crucial offensive and defensive units at all stages of the game. Trebuchets can be very good to force a fight with, that you know you are going to win on an even playing field, but you are going to lose attacking head on uphill into a castle. If you have the army advantage you are also free to push, taking down buildings one by one inching your way forward, because if they take a fight it is over anyway.

9.5 Do not play in a linear way!

One of the most glaring differences between top DM-players and their weaker counterparts is the way they expand on the map and move around it. In some instances you see players treating the map like a two way street just going back and forth in-between each other. But the map very seldomly asks for that. Usually you have 3+ angels to attack your enemy from. Make use of that! Even five units send around the sides can make a huge difference and can slow down the expansion of you enemy considerably.

Multiple attacks at once will also divide the attention of your opponent significantly and you might crush them in the main fight, while they concentrate on your patrolled side assault on one of their extra golds, while sending in a raid patrol on their farms at the same time. Timing here can be rather difficult and that is one of the main tasks to learn on your journey, but the payoff is huge.



Figure 6: Different angles of attack

10 Abbreviations

- DM: Deathmatch
- Eco: Economy
- GA: Green Arabia
- Halb: Halberdier
- HCA: Heavy Cavalry Archer
- MQ: Multiqueue
- Pala: Paladin
- RM: Random Map
- SQ: Singlequeue
- TC: Town Center
- To eco: Making/expanding economy
- Treb: Trebuchet
- UU: Unique Unit
- Vill: Villager