

THE ART OF EMPIRE

A third-person, action-adventure fantasy game

Set against the backdrop of the First Punic War in 265 BC, a former mercenary navigates a world of violent imperialism, mythical creatures, and warring pantheons of gods desperate to hold onto their waning power over civilization.

Titus, once entangled in the brutal conflicts between states vying for dominance, has left his sordid past behind in pursuit of pleasure and adventure. When a powerful sorceress recruits Titus to help search for her missing brother and Titus' fellow former mercenary, he reluctantly agrees to face the horrors of his past in search of long-needed answers.

Player character:

TITUS -- Former Mamertine mercenary involved in the lead-up to the first Punic War between Carthage and Rome. He's since left that life and tries to forget the myriad awful things he did. Now, Titus relentlessly pursues adventure and pleasure.

Titus has sharp blades and deadly accuracy with a bow.

Companions:

DIDO -- Named for the Carthaginian queen of legend. She's stoic, curt, and comes from an aristocratic merchant family.

Dido has a variety of magical abilities bestowed upon her by Tanit, the Carthaginian patron goddess.

THEO -- A Greek teen sold into slavery by the Romans. He escaped and became a thief to survive. He was later caught in the act by Titus, who now lets him tag along on adventures.

Theo is light, quick, and stealthy.

THE ART OF EMPIRE: TRAVELERS BEWARE [Cinematic #1]

EXT. VALLEY PATH TO FOREST - DAY

Hooves crunch in rhythm as THREE RIDERS on horseback pass the entrance to an ABANDONED SETTLEMENT. It's a pock of sad destruction in an otherwise serene, green valley.

TITUS pulls his reins, turns to face a lagging DIDO. Behind him, a looming OAK FOREST rises high like a city skyline.

TITUS
(exasperated)
Nice work. Mago always said you
were powerful.

Dido slows her horse and stares into the dark forest ahead. She faintly touches the NECKLACE she wears bearing THE SYMBOL OF TANIT. As she does, it GLOWS softly.

DIDO
We ride for the forest. Or do you
wish to lead? Prove your worth.

TITUS
Like I know where the hell we are
at this point. I'm not charging
you, seeing as we're practically
family, but I'm nearly out of
patience. Even for an old friend.
(beat)
And my ass hurts.

THEO, on his horse, BRUSHES PAST Dido with barely a glance.

DIDO
Shouldn't you be chasing girls,
child? Instead of ghosts with a
derelict?

THEO
I should chase them away from you.

Titus considers intervening, then wheels his horse around instead to ride with Theo. He CALLS BACK over his shoulder.

TITUS
Bet you next night's room he's not
here either. The Mago I knew had no
business this far from a tavern.

DIDO
Then you did not know my brother.

CUT TO:

EXT. VALLEY PATH TO FOREST - DAY

Titus and Theo ride in step, Dido trailing behind again. The forest nearly swallows their path now, and is even larger up close. It's clear Theo worries he crossed a line with Titus.

THEO
You know what they do to kids in
Carthage, right...?
(cautious)
So why do we care about this guy?

TITUS
Was one of the good ones, from when
I...wasn't so picky about my
company. When you were but a
twinkle in my loins.

THEO
No way I came from those dusty
marbles. You know he's probably
dead already.

TITUS
Or worse.

Dido, who had been watching them, looks away.

THEO
Hey, what if you and me went north
next? I hear there's--

Titus HUSHES Theo with a hand. A PAINED CRY rings out, then a YOUNG WOMAN in tatters stumbles into their path and COLLAPSES to the ground. Titus SWINGS OFF his horse--to the rescue.

Dido rides up. She stares, then quickly grows SUSPICIOUS.

DIDO
Titus. Leave her.

TITUS
(to the woman)
What's happened? Are you alright?

Titus LIFTS the scared woman up, cradling her. A TREE BARK PATTERN, like a faint tattoo, shows on her visible skin.

TITUS (CONT'D)
 She's a dryad. Doesn't seem to be
 hurt physically...

A PAINED LOOK of deep realization crosses his face. The woman buries her face into Titus' neck, who holds her tighter. He's seeing something far away though. Memories, perhaps.

Then the woman's FLESH RIPPLES. Her skin pattern hardens into not bark...but FEATHERS. Hands at Titus' neck become TALONS.

TITUS (CONT'D)
 You're safe.

The still-transforming HARPY SLASHES at Titus, then LAUNCHES from his arms, wings unfurling. Before she can attack however, Dido DRAWS HER STAFF, aims, and shoots a BLAST OF MAGIC.

The harpy LANDS HARD, leaving a long gouge in her wake.

DIDO
 Back on your steed!

Titus scrambles back onto his horse and all three ride off.

DIDO (CONT'D)
 Fool.

The fully transformed harpy RISES UP with a PIERCING SHRIEK that seems to tear the sky in two.

Transition to gameplay.

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THE ART OF EMPIRE: PRECARIOUS PURITY [Level Dialogue]

**Exact context for narrative beats to be worked out with level and narrative designers. The below are select, important moments for character / relationship arcs.*

Titus leads the group through a short series of forest landmarks as instructed by the Roman VILLAGE WOMAN. He locates the trailhead for the PATH OF PURITY, an ancient path designed by the gods to protect whatever lies at the end.

**Dido and Theo can act as guiding forces here if needed.*

While crossing treacherous terrain and ascending a steep mountainside, they encounter ENVIRONMENTAL PUZZLES and HIDDEN TRAPS, as well as waves of fauns and the larger, more dangerous SILENI.

**Each of their distinct attributes/abilities prove essential.*

1030_65_THEO_FIGHTS

After their first encounter with a Silenus.

DIDO

Little one, why have you learned to
fight as one much older?

THEO

I didn't learn to. I *had* to.

DIDO

(to Titus)

And you see no issue with this?
Waging battle alongside a child?

TITUS

The boy's old enough to make his
own choices. You see a chain?

THEO

No one will ever chain me again.

1030_75_FAMILY_TIES

Dido has sensed a trap that would have killed them all and
led them to successfully avoid or disarm it.

TITUS

I see why Mago always spoke so
highly of you.

DIDO

Yet never of you upon his return.

TITUS

I felt like I knew you. A tough but
caring sister--"powerful beyond
measure." Why did you even need my
help to search for him?

DIDO

We are strangers. As were you two.
Do not mistake the misdeeds he
carried out for you as familiarity.

1030_90_THEO_SOLVES

At Titus' prompting, Theo successfully completes the last part of an ENVIRONMENTAL PUZZLE the others could not have.

DIDO
You show skill far beyond your
years.

THEO
I'm not a child.

DIDO
(to Titus)
Perhaps he should be.

THEO
So you could sacrifice me to some
Carthage god?

DIDO
You conflate me with the fanatics,
boy. Rethink your assumptions.

1030_115_MAGO_GAMES

This conversation follows soon after Titus has saved Dido from nearly falling to her death. From this point forward, she has considerably softened to him, if not reluctantly.

TITUS
Did he ever make you play Senet?
That Egyptian game.

DIDO
All of the time.

TITUS
I loathed it. Mostly because I was
terrible.

DIDO
He never beat me once. I would give
anything to play with him again.

TITUS
...yeah, me too.

ACT ONE

[**CINEMATIC**] Outside of the FOREST, establish the tense group dynamic and their goal: find Dido's brother, MAGO. They pass by a burning, abandoned ROMAN CIVILIAN SETTLEMENT. Titus stops to help an injured DRYAD (nymph spirit), who's actually a HARPY (half woman, half bird) in disguise.

CHARACTER ARCS: Titus doesn't trust Dido. Dido resents that she needs his help. The origin of her magic is a secret. Dido believes Theo a child, and he in propaganda about Carthage.

[**GAMEPLAY**] They attempt to escape into the forest. Suggest 3x QTES here. Eventually, the harpy challenges them head on. Theo sneaks behind and stabs the harpy, horrifying Dido, though the harpy survives and flees.

Upon arrival to the SETTLEMENT where Mago was last seen, they fend off a herd of rowdy FAUNS (half man, half goat). And their horses are stolen in the fray. Still, only one LOCAL WOMAN will speak to a group with ties to Carthage.

The first LORE STONE is now available in this area. It details an oppressed people's resistance to Roman occupation. Theo especially cares about finding these.

[**CINEMATIC**] Fauns aren't normally violent, but reports are increasing. Someone named ARCTUS might have seen Mago--Arctus arrived one week ago asking for people to undertake a quest. He needs whatever lies at the end of the PATH OF PURITY. She suggests they fetch whatever it is and bring it to him.

CHARACTER ARCS: Dido can't believe Titus allows Theo to fight with them, while Titus grows resentful of her judgements.

ACT TWO

[**GAMEPLAY**] They follow the Path of Purity across RUGGED AND DANGEROUS TERRAIN, with puzzles and traps laid by the gods who designed it. They fight off further fauns, as well as the larger SILENI (half man and half goat/horse/beast).

[**CINEMATIC**] Titus saves Dido from falling to her death.

CHARACTER ARCS: Dido begins to acknowledge Theo's skill, and he reveals bits of his backstory to her. Dido sees that Titus considers letting her fall but doesn't. They bond over Mago.

[**CINEMATIC**] The Path of Purity takes them to a VALLEY OF UNICORNS. It's breathtaking. Ref: giraffes in *The Last of Us*. Another HARPY, larger than before, swoops down to attack.

[**GAMEPLAY**] It's a tense, brutal fight. The harpy knocks Theo unconscious and deflects Dido's magic with her wings.

[CINEMATIC] The harpy gets Titus on the ground. *Suggest QTE here to hold her back.* Just as all seems lost, Titus's sword crackles with magic and he stabs the harpy.

[GAMEPLAY] *Dido can now IMBUE Titus' weapons with magic. The second lore stone is also now available in this area. It details the same people's struggle to adapt to Roman culture.*

Titus hopes hair from a unicorn tail is all that's needed, refusing to kill one or take its horn. A rock slide from battle has blocked the way back and opened up a new path via an ABANDONED MINE SHAFT that cuts through the mountain.

CHARACTER ARCS: *Titus and Dido's trust in each other grows.*

Out the other side, they find a THIRD ROMAN SETTLEMENT. It's also entirely abandoned, except for...

[CINEMATIC] ...an INJURED CENTAUR, revealed to be Arctus. FAUNUS, the gentle Roman god of the forest, is using mysterious PANIC MAGIC to clear the forest of humans. Arctus led the rebellion with Mago until Mago was captured.

Arctus strings a LYRE with the unicorn hair--only a magical inversion of the melody Faunus plays can break his spell. Arctus sends them towards the SACRED GROVE OF FAUNUS at the center of the forest. Any strong beast possessed will need to be weakened first in order to be freed.

ACT THREE

[GAMEPLAY] *Titus can now access the lyre as a weapon. The final lore stone is also available here. The people in question were actually the minor Greek gods, furious as the major gods struck deals to merge while the minor gods' stories were rewritten or absorbed without their consent.*

They fight through waves of possessed magical creatures, including centaurs and tree-bound dryads now. Upon reaching the Sacred Grove, all fighting stops. A massive tree with a split opening in its trunk stands opposite them.

[CINEMATIC] They find Mago imprisoned inside. He tried to reason with Faunus, to no avail. They leave Theo to pick the lock while they confront the horned Faunus, who sits in a throne of twined branches above, holding his pan flute.

[GAMEPLAY] Faunus plays his melody. A third GIANT HARPY arrives to fight, aided by other possessed creatures. After enough damage, Titus sets the harpy free by playing the lyre.

Faunus takes his GOD-BEAST FORM--enlarged and more animalistic--and jumps down to fight himself. The harpies join the heroes, free from his control. When nearly defeated--

[**CINEMATIC**] Dido signals to Theo, who is done freeing Mago.

[**GAMEPLAY**] The fight continues. Theo sneaks behind and leaps onto Faunus' back, slicing his throat.

[**CINEMATIC**] Mago extends a hand to the exhausted god, calling him "Pan." He offers "his deal" one last time. Faunus hesitates, then reaches back. There's a blinding light and Mago vanishes. Faunus has returned to normal...without horns.

[**GAMEPLAY**] Faunus and Pan have been wrestling for control ever since their stores began to intertwine. Mago offered Pan a place in the Carthaginian pantheon if he'd make Mago his mortal avatar...like Dido is for TANIT.

[**CINEMATIC**] Mago should have been the avatar for BAAL HAMMON, Tanit's consort, like all men in their family, but instead Dido became the first for Tanit in lieu of her brother. The harpies could sense her power, though it grows weaker the farther from Carthage she is.

Dido suspects Mago will attempt to turn the tides of the first Punic War in Carthage's favor with Pan's power. He may even seek out other Greek gods willing to strike deals as they get written out of the burgeoning Greco-Roman pantheon.

CHARACTER ARCS: *Some trust has been lost, but Titus and Theo will accompany Dido on this next adventure: to stop Mago.*