

Lost Ruins of Armak

[Complete strategy guide: Beginner / Average / Experienced / Expert](#)

If you are a beginner (0 - 2 games played)

This is (mostly) not a deckbuilding game. Unlike other deckbuilding games, like Dominion, this game does not encourage deck improvement beyond the 2nd round. The game only lasts 5 rounds, so the cards you buy in rounds 1 and 2 are typically the only cards that will be played more than once. You should therefore focus on buying the best cards (see below) at the beginning, then exploration and research starting on round 2/3.

Get assistants early. Although it may seem like you have to spend many resources just to get something that gives you a single resource, it is very worth it. In most high-level games, players will have at least 1 if not 2 assistants by the end of the 1st round. They will also upgrade them as soon as possible. You will want to max your research points anyways, so getting assistants early gets you more resources.

Do not focus on exiling. Although Fear cards appear to be dead weight, they can be just as useful as a coin or compass. The Boot travel symbol that Fear provides allows you to go to the tent sites (starting locations). Many things in the game also require discarding a card as a cost (like the Jewel starting location). There are enough GOOD things you can do with Fear that it is ok to have around 1 in each round, so you do not need to exile them right away. Specifically, if exploring on round one, do not explore onto an exile bonus.

The best cards (and assistants) are flexible. Your needs will change each round depending on what guardians you encounter, where you are on the research track, and what else is in your hand.

The most flexible (best) cards:

- Dog
- Lantern
- Star Charts
- Binoculars

The second best cards give you fewer choices, but are still fairly flexible:

- Pickaxe
- Carrier Pidgeon
- Stone Key

The third best give you limited choices, but enough resources to still be flexible:

- Tent/Pathfinder's Staff (better in later rounds)
- Air Balloon/Whip/Airdrop
- Fishing Rod/Precision Compass
- Guiding Skull/Guiding Stone
- Airplane

The most flexible (best) assistants:

- 2 gold
- pay 1 Boot for 1 arrow
- 1 tablet
- pay 1 gold for 1 arrow (upgraded can get a jewel)

Armed with this knowledge you can expect scores of at least 60, which in games of beginners can win you the game! If everything you just read sounds familiar, read on for average scores of 70+. Otherwise, go play a game using your new knowledge, then come back.

If you are an average player, (3 - 10 games played)

Buy 3-4 cards by the end of round 2. Your starting cards give 1 resource, most cards give 2, and expensive cards usually give 3. A hand with 2 cheap cards will give more resources than a hand with 1 expensive card. More cards in your deck means you draw Fear cards less often. Cheap cards can also be used to travel (ex: Precision Compass is terrible if used as a travel symbol, but Gold Pan is valuable either way).

This means that on the first round, you generally should not buy a 4-cost card, unless:

- you get the 2-gold assistant
- you send one of your Archeologists to get 2 gold
- you bought a coin Artifact (ex: Trader's Scales, Serpent's Gold)

Instead, you should buy 2-3 cheap cards. You will have a much stronger second round, and you might have enough money to still compete for cards like Dog. Some early Artifacts can also contribute towards a strong deck (ex: Star Charts, Guiding Skull).

Plan to explore on round 2. If you have bought items during round one, it will be unlikely that you will have 2 fears in your second hand. It is therefore most efficient for you to spend some of your travel symbols going to a tier 1 (or tier 2) location. You should therefore go into round 2 with at least 1 compass to spare, or have bought items that give enough compasses for you to explore.

Send your Glass and Journal in different directions. On Bird side, it is crucial that you do not advance both of your tokens to the Jewel space. It then becomes very difficult for you to advance further since you need a lot of tablets and arrows, and will be competing for them with other players. Even if you could get a very good assistant by advancing both of your tokens onto the Jewel space, it is usually a mistake. Have at least one of them (ideally the Glass) advance to the Compass-Arrow space so that you can have the option of advancing to the second-level Jewel space.

Get as many Research track bonuses as possible. The extra resources will help you research more, which will in turn help you get more of the bonuses. Competition around these bonuses is fierce. If one player gets all of the bonuses (8-10), they will typically have about 10 more points

than they would have otherwise.

Let some Guardians get you. This is especially true in the first round. Exploring will give you a huge influx of resources (6 if exploring a Tier 1 location). If the resources given will help you with research, it is often worth it to spend them there rather than overcoming the Guardian, since you will get more resources back (in the form of compasses and assistants). You will take a Fear, but if you get a good assistant, it is a good trade. One example is the Monkey guardian (4-coins). On the first round players, usually have 4 coins available and use them to clear the guardian. This is usually a mistake, since that is the most important time to be buying cards! It would be better to take the fear, buy 2 cards than clear the guardian, and get no items.

Save your 3rd and 4th Idols. Spending the first two Idols quickly is usually a good investment. Spending either of the last two Idols is very costly, both in points and in your flexibility. Do not spend your 4th Idol until the last round (if at all). Spending your 4th Idol is only sometimes worth 4+ points, and it is very difficult to judge accurately unless it is the last round.

If you are already playing this way, you should be scoring at least 70 each game, sometimes in the 80's. Play some more games, and then read the next section to eek out another 10 points.

If you are an experienced player, (10 - 30 games played)

Take Fear locations and Artifacts during rounds 4 and 5. The whole game is a race, and locations that give you a fear also give you an extra resource, putting you slightly ahead of the other players. The main downside to Fear cards is that they can prevent you from drawing your good cards. If you collect Fear during rounds 4 and 5, however, you likely will not draw any of them (unless you have already drawn your whole deck). The negative points at the end are trivial compared to the advantage of being slightly ahead of your opponents. If you have means of making Fear useful (ex: Boot->Arrow assistant), you can do this as early as round 2!



Prioritize buying self-exiling cards during round 3. These include

- Hot Air Balloon
- Coconut Flask
- Rough Map
- Journal
- Whip

All of these give powerful 1-time effects, and are good cards to have at any point in the game. They are especially good on rounds 4 and 5, however, because you are aiming for more difficult exploration (Hot Air Balloon, Rough Map), higher research takes more resources (Journal), there are more Artifact choices available (Whip, Rough Map), and your cards are better (Coconut Flask). Cards you buy in round 3 will likely only be played once anyways, so normally powerful cards like Lantern are often going to be a worse buy than self-exiling cards.

Side note on Bear Trap: it is a good card, but only at the beginning of the game. Buying it on round 3 means you will want to use it on round 5, and if you are playing Bird side, you should be expecting to overcome a guardian for free via the research track. Play it in rounds 2-4 or it might end up redundant.

Stall if there are no good options. Sometimes all of the cards (or assistants) are mediocre.

Usually your opponents are shopping around the same time as you, so you can try to get them to buy first to reveal better options for you. The most common stalling method is buying 1-cost

equipment, but if you have cards in hand, research progress, or Archeologists left, start with those.

Additionally, be aware of opponent's cards that make purchases (Whip, Precision Compass, Fishing Rod, and Airdrop). For example, if someone bought Whip on round 1, it is good to go into round 2 with extra compasses. If you play before them in the next round, you can get the visible good card first. If you play after and there are not any good, card available, save the compasses for as long as possible. They will usually buy something (even if it is mediocre), potentially revealing a good card that you are now ready to buy.

Be careful with card draw. Drawing the right card is amazing, but there are only a few situations where you can control which card you draw:

- Large Backpack/Obsidian Earrings (you just bought what you want to draw)
- Crystal Earrings/Monkey Idol (you've placed on top of the deck the card you want to draw)
- You have so many card-drawing affects you know you will draw your entire deck
- There is exactly 1 card in your deck (and you remember what it is)

Most of the time, you won't know if the next card is going to be useful or not. In these situations where you are considering *spending resources* to draw, follow these rules:

- DON'T draw if there is another option that will get you what you need, even if it is less efficient
- DON'T draw if the top card might be bad to draw (ex: Airplane with no Archeologists)
- DON'T draw if most of the remaining cards in your deck net you only 1 resource
- DO draw if you need to discard, but your current cards are essential (ex: guardian requires discard)
- DO draw if most of your good cards are in the deck, and you already have most of your bad cards

Explore Tier-2 locations when you are about to become the starting player. Sending an Archeologist to a Tier-2 location is the most efficient way to use an Archeologist. With proper timing, you can guarantee yourself a second trip and deny your opponents the opportunity. This applies most often to player 3 exploring a Tier-2 on round 2. You will have to refrain from exploring or buying artifacts the round before in order to save up enough compasses. Buying cards like Hot Air Balloon, Rough Map, or Automobile/Steamboat should be a priority. Cheap items that give two travel symbols are also a great buy (Gold Pan, Sturdy Boots).

Sometimes sacrifice exploring for artifacts (Bird Side). Exploring gives more points and more resources than a single activation of an artifact. The downsides to exploring are the unreliable resources and a Fear if you do not overcome the Guardian. Getting an idol mitigates the unreliability somewhat, unless you have already spent 4. Most artifacts are more reliable, and increase the power of your deck. To know which to spend your compasses on, follow these guidelines:

- Avoid 4-cost, 1-point artifacts if you will only play it once (unless it was free, or it is the last round and you have already used both your archeologists).
- Buy versatile artifacts at any point (Star Charts, Stone Key, and Tigerclaw Hairpin).
- Buy the artifact if it gives exactly what you need, especially if there are no revealed locations that give those resources. The opposite is true if it is at the end of the game and you can accurately anticipate the unrevealed location (see below).

- Explore at the end if you are confident you can finish researching no matter what the site gives.
- Buy artifacts that give 3+ coins on rounds 1-2.
- Explore a Tier-2 when you are about to become the starting player (see above).
- Explore if you are very far behind or very far ahead in research.
- Avoid 2-cost artifacts early (except Sundial and Inscribed Blade).

Maximize every card (and assistant). To get the most resources you need to use your cards as efficiently as possible. There are 9 kinds of cards, and the ways of maximizing each are different.

Starting deck: Boat/Car/Airplane travel symbols are worth 2 resources. Using your starting Funding and Exploration cards as your primary methods of travel to turn those 1-value cards into 2-value cards. You should not exile these even if you can for free, otherwise you will have to travel with purchased cards. Exceptions are having cards that discount travel, travel assistants, or many unhelpful artifacts.

Basic: These are all the cards that give either coins, compasses, or research resources. They can be played in every circumstance, and always give the same resources. Almost all of these cards are already perfectly efficient. The one exception is Gold Pan -- always try to use this as 2 travel symbols.

End-of-round bonus: There are 3 cards that give you extra resources if you use them as your last action; Sundial, Stopwatch, and Chronometer. Think of what your needs next round will be. If you need the extra resources from these cards, play them at the end, otherwise play them immediately. Also, note that Sundial gives its maximum value of 2 as EITHER tablet->jewel, or as a travel symbol. Chronometer gives a value of 4 if used as travel symbols, but you should try to use other cards first.

Card-draw: These are potentially the most powerful, but only if you are able to play the drawn card(s). Maximize these by buying powerful cards and exiling Fear. The main downside to these is their unpredictability. See above for ways of making card-draw more predictable.

Random-site activation: These activate a random unrevealed Tier-1 or Tier-2 site. Maximize these by always having at least 1 card available to draw. The main benefit of these is they give many research resources, and the main downside is their unpredictability. You should play these near the beginning of your turn so you can plan accordingly. See below for more ways of making these cards reliable.

Revealed-site activation: These either activate a revealed site remotely, or moves one of your archeologists to the site and activates it. Maximize by planning to spend all of those resources this round. In general, use these cards later in a round once more information is revealed (new guardians/locations/cards). Use Sturdy Boots or Passage Shell as travel symbol(s) when possible.

Discount: These give a discount for either buying cards, moving up the research track, or exploring. Maximize by getting the full discount (ex: buy a 4-cost card with Whip), and by planning the round before how you will use the discount. If you do not think you will be able to maximize the discount, consider using the card as a travel symbol instead.

Fear: These are the second-hardest resource to spend. Maximize by buying cards/assistants that require you to discard, traveling to tent locations, or overcoming Guardians (1/3 of them require a Boot symbol or discard).

Exile: These are the hardest resource to spend. You must have a Fear to exile, and if you are maximizing the Fear itself, you need to have already played/discarded it. Maximize by buying Artifacts that give a Fear, or traveling to sites that give a Fear.

Plan to overcome a Guardian with the research track (Bird side). Researching the last row with the journal lets you overcome a Guardian on a spot you occupy for free. That means that you need to plan (typically the round before) on where you want to send your journal-wielding Archeologist, since there are usually only a few Guardians or unexplored locations left. If you cannot overcome a guardian in this way, its better that you do not research the last spot (it is only worth 2 points on its own).

Spend all your resources each round. To compete for research track bonuses you must research quickly. To have a strong deck, you need to buy cards early. If you get resources that you cannot easily spend (ex: Jewels on Bird side, round 2), make changes so you can spend everything. This might mean not upgrading your assistants as early as normal, or overcoming a guardian. The two exceptions to this rule are

- if you are, saving compasses to explore a Tier-2 (see above)
- if it is round 3 or 4 and you are saving coins for research/travel and none of your tools give coins

Play with these things in mind, and you'll be scoring 80-90 points every game! The last section are improvements I am making in my own games. These might not get you more points, but they will get you more wins!

If you are an expert player, (30+ games played)

Be exactly one move ahead. Against evenly matched opponents, you will often be racing for the same short-term goals (ex: resource track bonus, valuable card). If you are in a position to 'win' a particular race, wait until just the turn before they would get it to get it yourself. Use those earlier moves to secure other contested goals.

Anticipate your next hand. Because newly purchased cards go onto the bottom of your deck, as well as your hand at the end of a round, you can usually predict what your next hand is going to be. Use this to your advantage and buy cards that will synergize well with that hand.

Some examples include

- buy Parrot (next hand has at least 1 Fear)
- buy Large Backpack (next hand has lots of money)

- buy Gold Pan (next hand has no Boat travel symbols, and you want to travel to a 2-Boat location)

Also, having a deck that has 10 total cards can be great in rounds 2-4. If you don't have any draw effects (more common in early rounds), having 10 total cards means you basically have 2 hands that you are switching between, so you can know with 100% accuracy what your next hand will be.

You should also try to anticipate everyone else's next hands. While you do not need to memorize everything, keeping track of key cards can be quite helpful. Some examples include

- Surprise research cards (see below)
- Dog/Tigerclaw Hairpin (you can block the site they want)
- Ostrich/Sea Turtle (you can predict where they will travel)

anticipate unrevealed locations. Near the end of the game, most of the Tier-1 locations will have been revealed. Because there are only 10 Tier-1 locations in total, once there are only 1 or 2 unexplored locations left, you can more accurately guess what resources you might get by exploring them. This is also important if one of the players is using Guiding Stone (reveals a Tier-1) or Guiding Skull (reveals a Tier-2). Just like your own discard, the revealed location goes onto the bottom of the deck. For Tier-2 there are 6 total, so you know that you will not see that location again until the other 5 have been revealed.

Here are all the locations (courtesy of @Cohensius):

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1h9K0_3Cvyao0EHpCmkxp...

For Tier-2, you just have to memorize them. For Tier-1, notice there are about 3 of each:

- 3 sites that give a Jewel
- 4 sites that give an Arrow
- 4 sites that give a Tablet
- 3 sites that give a Coin
- 3 sites that give a Compass
- 2 sites that Draw

So if there's a specific resource you're hoping for, count how many of those locations you see. If it is 1 or less, you will probably get it! If it is 2-3, you probably will not. This only works once there are only 1-2 unexplored locations left.

Starve your opponents. In each round beyond the first, you should be able to identify a resource an opponent will be short on. Sometimes, there will only be one (efficient) way of getting the resource. If you take it, they will have to make inefficient and predictable moves that you can take advantage of. Playing like this will make everyone, including you, score lower. The goal is to lose fewer points than your opponents. The more players there are the less effective this is. Here are some examples of when you can starve an opponent:

- Round 2. They took the coin->arrow assistant, and have no cards that give coins. The only available card that would help them is Gold Pan. You should buy the Gold Pan, even if you do

not need the coins.

- Round 2, Bird Side. There are not any revealed locations that give tablets, and your opponents need to pass the arrow-tablet-tablet research space. You should take the tablet tent location, even if you do not need the tablets.
- Round 5. They have already placed their archeologists and have spent all of their idols, and are depending on a specific artifact to give them resources to continue research. You should take that artifact, especially if it is cheap (ex: Sundial, Serpent Idol).

Surprise your opponents with research cards. These are:

- Idol of Ara-Anu (research with a Jewel discount)
- Inscribed Blade (research with a 1-Arrow or 2-Tablet discount)
- Journal (research with the journal for free)
- Carrier Pidgeon (2 instant Tablets)

If one of these cards is hidden in your hand, try to use it to steal a research-track bonus from someone. They will be playing 'be exactly one turn ahead' (see above), and if your other resources indicate you cannot research on your next turn, they will likely do something else, leaving you an opening.

Buy Artifacts that refund their cost. This is mostly for the last round so your deck does not become too full of Artifacts. No Artifacts give compasses directly, so the main way to get their cost refunded is to refresh/activate assistants that give compasses. The best case is with either the double-compass assistant, or the discount assistant. You can also get the cost of an Artifact refunded by drawing an item that gives compasses, but you have to know for certain which card you will draw. For example, use Money Idol/Obsidian Earring to get Brush/Bow and Arrows.

Keep track of how many fear-using guardians you have seen. The best way to use a fear card is on a guardian that requires a boot icon or a discard. If you have have seen very few of these guardians and have a fear in hand, explore first before using the fear in some other way (ex: Lantern). You are also likely to get an exile bonus from a guardian.

Balance your deck and assistants. To be the most adaptable you should try to have a wide variety of resources during the round. Cards that let you choose what they give (Dog, Tigerclaw Hairpin, etc.) do this best. Your cards overall should also give different things. Have a card or two that gives coins, compasses, and research resources. If you are missing something, get a card that fills that spot, even if the card itself is mediocre.

That is it for now! I will be updating this regularly until I have covered all the major aspects of the game.

What are some of your key strategies? Are there certain cards you feel are underrated? Disagree with some of this guide? Comment below!

I will be adding a full breakdown of every card if this guide gets at least 100 'likes'.

Edit: We got over 100 'likes'! Thank you everyone! Here is the promised card breakdown:

<https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/2751479/break-down-every-ca...>

Tell us your thoughts on when you think is the best time to use different cards! The next goal is 200 'likes' for a Snake-side guide!



Tools

<u>Tool</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Play Value</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Speed</u>	<u>Versatility</u>	<u>Best Used...</u>
Aeroplane	4	4	3	0	1	from round 2, with a small deck
Air Drop	2	4	1(0)	-1	1	2-coin discount, stall for better cards
Army Knife	3	2	1	0	1	always get tablets, usually compasses
Automobile	3	2	3	1	1	explore tier-2, buy contested artifacts
Axe	2	2	2	0	-1	with fear sites
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Bear Trap	2	4	1(0)	0	1	leftover guardian or expensive guardian
Binoculars	4	3	1	0	1	near the end of the round
Bow & Arrows	2	3	2	0	0	fight guardians earlier
Brush	3	3	3	0	0	explore earlier
Carrier Pigeon	2	2	1	1	1	surprise research, upgrade assistant
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Chronometer	3	3/2	2	-1/1	1	explore tier-2
Dog	3	3	1	0	1	discard fear for jewel
Fishing Rod	2	3	2	0	1	with coin->arrow assistant
Flask	2	3	1(0)	-1	1	on round 5, draw entire deck +1
Gold Pan	1	2	1	1	0	travel to tier-2
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Grappling Hook	2	1	2	-1	-1	never, only points
Hat	1	2	1	1	0	early, as deck filler
Horse	4	3	1	0	1	with expensive deck
Hot Air Balloon	2	5	1(0)	0	1	travel to tier-2
Journal	3	4	1(0)	1	1	surprise research, free idol (snake)
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Lantern	3	2	2	0	1	discard fear for jewel
Large Backpack	3	3	1	-1	1	buy card with needed resource
Machete	4	3	1	0	0	early, with fear sites
Ostrich	3	3	1	0	0	travel to tier-2 car site
Pack Donkey	4	2	1	-1	1	expensive deck, with Aeroplane
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Parrot	2	2	2	0	-1	constant fear/bad artifacts
Pickaxe	1	2	1	0	1	for research track bonuses
Precision Compass	4	3	1	1	1	get 3-value artifacts
Revolver	4	3	1	0	-1	fight 2 guardians per round
Rope	2	1	1	-1	-1	constant fear
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Rough Map	1	3	1(0)	0	1	explore tier-2, round 4/5
Sea Turtle	3	3	1	0	0	travel to tier-2 boat site
Steam Boat	3	2	3	1	1	explore tier-2
Sturdy Boots	1	3	1	0	1	travel to tier-2 car site
Tent	4	3	2	0	1	on tier-1 sites
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Theodolite	3	3	1	0	0	with other compasses
Torch	2	2	2	0	-1	with fear sites
Trowel	1	2	1	0	0	bird side research
Watch	1	2/3	1	-1/1	0	pass w/ coin->arrow assistant
Whip	2	4	1(0)	1	1	as travel if no great options



TOOLS

Tool	Cost	Play Value	Points	Speed	Versatility	Best Used...
Aeroplane	4	4	3	0	1	from round 2, with a small deck
Air Drop	2	4	1(0)	-1	1	2-coin discount, stall for better cards
Army Knife	3	2	1	0	1	always get tablets, usually compasses
Automobile	3	2	3	1	1	explore tier-2, buy contested artifacts
Axe	2	2	2	0	-1	with fear sites
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Bear Trap	2	4	1(0)	0	1	leftover guardian or expensive guardian
Binoculars	4	3	1	0	1	near the end of the round
Bow & Arrows	2	3	2	0	0	fight guardians earlier
Brush	3	3	3	0	0	explore earlier
Carrier Pigeon	2	2	1	1	1	surprise research, upgrade assistant
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Chronometer	3	3/2	2	-1/1	1	explore tier-2
Dog	3	3	1	0	1	discard fear for jewel
Fishing Rod	2	3	2	0	1	with coin->arrow assistant
Flask	2	3	1(0)	-1	1	on round 5, draw entire deck +1
Gold Pan	1	2	1	1	0	travel to tier-2
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Grappling Hook	2	1	2	-1	-1	never, only points
Hat	1	2	1	1	0	early, as deck filler
Horse	4	3	1	0	1	with expensive deck
Hot Air Balloon	2	5	1(0)	0	1	travel to tier-2
Journal	3	4	1(0)	1	1	surprise research, free idol (snake)
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Lantern	3	2	2	0	1	discard fear for jewel
Large Backpack	3	3	1	-1	1	buy card with needed resource
Machete	4	3	1	0	0	early, with fear sites
Ostrich	3	3	1	0	0	travel to tier-2 car site
Pack Donkey	4	2	1	-1	1	expensive deck, with Aeroplane
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Parrot	2	2	2	0	-1	constant fear/bad artifacts
Pickaxe	1	2	1	0	1	for research track bonuses
Precision Compass	4	3	1	1	1	get 3-value artifacts
Revolver	4	3	1	0	-1	fight 2 guardians per round
Rope	2	1	1	-1	-1	constant fear
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Rough Map	1	3	1(0)	0	1	explore tier-2, round 4/5
Sea Turtle	3	3	1	0	0	travel to tier-2 boat site
Steam Boat	3	2	3	1	1	explore tier-2
Sturdy Boots	1	3	1	0	1	travel to tier-2 car site
Tent	4	3	2	0	1	on tier-1 sites
---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Theodolite	3	3	1	0	0	with other compasses
Torch	2	2	2	0	-1	with fear sites
Trowel	1	2	1	0	0	bird side research
Watch	1	2/3	1	-1/1	0	pass w/ coin->arrow assistant
Whip	2	4	1(0)	1	1	as travel if no great options

Assessing the Opening Situation

There are three main things to assess in a new game: your starting hand, the available cards to buy, and the available assistants. (Site and research track bonuses can be relevant too, but are more instrumental, based on these first three.) Let us take these one at a time.

Hand: Probably the first thing you notice. There are three possible states of your opening hand, since of your three starting card types, one of them will only appear once:

- 1 Fear: the most flexible situation in the first round, since you have all your “useful” cards in hand. It is not always ideal, however: if you have the compasses in hand to explore, 2 Fear lets you grab a jewel first, making it easier to get what you need from an explore action to be able to get your first assistant.
- 1 Coin: this may reduce your buying potential or range of travel options, which can occasionally be crucial, but is usually manageable.
- 1 Compass: Arguably, the most difficult opening hand, as it will force most players to use the compass site first if they wish to explore this round.

Cards: Scan the available cards to purchase, and decide if any are worth competing for right off the bat. Some cards (like Dog and Lantern) are versatile enough to always be useful, but depending on your objectives (explore a lot? research a lot? continually improve your deck?) there are plenty of cards, including 1-cost cards, that you might very much want. Depending on what you see, it might prompt you to move to the coins camp first (to afford Aeroplane, for instance) or perhaps to buy a card before moving anyone at all.

To be clear, while I will discuss the various objectives you might want to focus on in a moment, every player should aim to buy some cards first round, even if it is not their first priority (and in general, two cheap cards beat a single expensive one). Early card investment is essential for success throughout the game. However, when assessing the initial cards, always ask: why would I want this card? What do I want to accomplish in round 2, will this help, and how well will it work with the other cards I have bought? Buy all you can, but do not buy randomly.

How fast or slow cards work matters too. Hot Air Balloon is a very fast way to beat others to claim a site bonus you really want. On the other hand, using Torch, then Axe, then Pickaxe would be an incredibly slow way to turn 2 Fear into 2 tablets and an arrow for research. Taking four turns to advance one research step certainly will not win you any research track bonuses... but if there are no good assistants out and you want to stall and see if someone will reveal a better one, and then slow is better!

There are also a few (very rare) cases where the single available artifact is worth going for in the first round, such as Passage Shell, Star Charts, or Guiding Skull (I am sure you can think of others). This often means hitting the compass camp first and not exploring, but if the artifact gives you value equal to two camps it will usually be worth it, and (at the very least) adds a plane to your deck. If you go this route, try to eventually get the tablet assistant, to make it easier to activate the artifact again whenever it comes back around.

Assistants: Compared to cards, this one is a little more clearly defined. Maybe you have a few favorite assistants, but the one I am confident saying is always worth competing for is the coin assistant. (I am not going to justify that here, as there are other threads on that topic.) If you see him, or possibly another assistant you very much want, consider shaping your first round strategy to get you that assistant asap.

That usually means exploring, and using the idol to gain a research resource instead of using it to deal with the guardian. On Bird Temple, 7 of the 10 possible Level I sites give a research resource you need, making exploration a sound strategy for getting a first round assistant. If you expect stiff competition, consider the risky step of exploring as your first action instead of a campsite! (On Snake, that drops to only 4 of 10, so a slow and steady approach is better -- secure tablets or a jewel before exploring.) If your hand and store only add up to 3 compasses, this may also mean needing to explore a site with a compass bonus for insurance, so check your travel options to be sure that is possible before committing yourself.

A word of caution about a hard drive for assistants: part of the reason the coin assistant is the only one worth doing this for is not just that he is strategically superior -- it's that doing this for anyone else generally means you will miss out on buying good cards, or possibly, any cards at all. In addition, no assistant is worth getting a hand of just starting cards in round 2.

Setting Goals

it should be clear by now that as you make the above assessments, you are also deciding on your objectives for this round. Often, the answer is a mix: there are good cards, a great assistant, and maybe you have an idea for how you want round 2 to go as well. However, when pulled in different directions, set a priority: determine which actions you must not be locked out of (whether a campsite or a card), and steel yourself to take this action even if it may lose your shot at a secondary goal.

For instance, buying a card straight off might mean losing the coins camp and getting fewer cards overall, but if that card is crucial to your round 2 goal, that may be okay. Any time you buy before moving consider what campsite options may be left to you by next turn, based on the number of players. This is safest when your second action will be exploring, and you are fine with any spare campsite. However, if you plan to take two campsites, or if you absolutely need to take compasses first, strongly consider moving to the one you want first. No card is worth risking someone completely eating your lunch on the first round.

Likewise, if you need to take an action to prepare (i.e., getting more coins or compasses to afford a purchase), before you pull that trigger consider how likely it is that someone else wants it too, and have a plan B if that card is snapped up. Of course, extra coins or compasses are pretty easy to pivot from, and if there are several good items out you'd be happy with, definitely start by moving to coins; at least one good one will likely still be there

next turn, and with luck you'll get a few (more may always be revealed).

As with cards, the same goes for assistants: consider your odds, and what you will do if you lose the contest. If there are two good assistants available, this is pretty low risk. In addition, if you are torn between cards and an assistant, go for the one you are more certain to accomplish, since it is unlikely your opponents will let you get both.

Considering Turn Order.

Did I say there were three main things to assess before moving? Well, okay, four: turn order can also matter quite a bit too how achievable your possible goals may be. It also creates an inherent dynamic that should incline you towards a certain goal, which I will summarize at the top of each section -- this should help you decide when torn between different objectives. (I will be using the Bird Temple board as the default point of reference in this section, but will note one or two considerations where they differ on Snake.)

Player 1

Starting Resources: 2 coins

Summary: Buy Cards!

First Glance: This player gets first crack at buying any great cards initially dealt, but absolutely must take the compass site if they want to explore. If there are not any must-buy cards, they also get first crack at any campsite -- a research resource, or coins to stock up on tools for a great round 2.

In More Depth: Unless there is a top-notch card out, Player 1 is often at less of an advantage than it seems. Generally, I'd advise against exploring, and instead work to position yourself well going forward. Your choice between a research resource or coins as your first move depends very much on whether you are motivated more by the cards or the assistants you see. Taking the research resource is more defensive; guaranteeing that nobody will get both of them and an easy assistant, but it is likely they can get around this by exploring. Generally, therefore, I lean to coins first; if you can also get a research resource, you will have 6-7 coins to spend this turn, which should strengthen your deck immensely for the duration of the game.

Snake Variation: On Snake, if you have 2 compass in hand, there is another exception to taking coins first: the ideal strategy is to hit the tablet camp, then the arrow camp (which is very unlikely to be taken yet, even in a 4-player game). This will let you move your glass 2 steps up, earning you 2 coins and probably a bonus tile -- equivalent to a free visit to the coin site, and likely putting you ahead in the race to rescue a second assistant. If you have only 1 compass, though, stick to the coins-first plan.

Multiplayer Variants:

In a 2-player game there is less drafting off sites explored by other players until late in the game, so it can be tempting to explore in the first round. However, I'd advise instead taking

a page out of the Player 3 advice to store compasses and buy tools that will let you explore a Level II site in the 2nd round (this will net you more resources total by the end of round 3). If you see an assistant who will really help with this (coins or a travel assistant), it can be an exception to my coins-first advice; 1 out of 3 times, your opponent will need to hit compasses to explore; if you hit research first and they go compass, you get to take the other research resource and have first pick of assistants.

In a 3- or 4-player game, there is no greater-than-average urgency to get to the Level II sites. You will be going last next round, so your chance of a free dig site is slim. This is why I advise taking coins first and picking off 2, ideally 3+ tools to use next round: because in that round you will likely need to explore for yourself, and you may not get any research track bonuses, but if you're well-equipped it's entirely possible to get both your assistants by the end and be caught up to the pack on research.

Player 2

Starting Resources: 1 coin, 1 compass

Summary: Explore!

First Glance: The second player is probably the one most invested in exploring in the first round, giving them a guaranteed explored site to revisit in round 2.

In More Depth: If we assume that Player 2 will use their second action to explore, the question becomes chiefly, how best to use their first action? This depends in part on their opening hand:

- A one-compass hand makes it critical for them to visit the compass site first, case closed. However, if Player 1 -- who must always go compass if they decide to explore -- beats them to it, this puts Player 2 in a bind, so they must quickly pivot their plan for this round. They will still get first crack at explored sites in round 2, but without an idol, gaining an assistant this round is unlikely (except in a 2-player game). In this scenario, they are therefore thrust into a position more like being Player 1, and should refer to the advice there.
- With two compass cards in hand, they have the luxury of visiting one of the initial research resource campsites first, guaranteeing their first assistant this round -- and, under the occasional ideal circumstances, being able to actually gain both assistants in the first round (for more on this niche maneuver, see [the recent comprehensive strategy article](#) by timthe3nchanter).

In the second scenario, you have more flexibility, and the question becomes: which research resource to choose? This depends on your goals for the round. If you want to get an assistant (ideally coins, to buy more cards) then take the jewel camp. You are more likely to gain an arrow than a gem from exploring, and either way you would rather use your idol for arrow/tablets than spend a coin for a gem this round, when you very much want to buy an item or two. (Though if going for the coin assistant, and you have a one-Fear hand, do not hesitate to discard a coin for jewel -- just be mindful of which coin to keep for optimal travel purposes!)

If no great assistant is out, take the arrow camp first; most guardians require an arrow. Since you are in no rush, it makes more sense to deal with the guardian this round since you are presumably coming back here in round 2, and this will save you a Fear (and future effort). Also, use that overcome action strategically: if a good card you can afford is out, seize it first. If there is not, stall by dealing with the guardian, and probably someone will buy a card or two in the meantime.

Snake Variation: Taking the tablets camp before exploring on Snake is advisable, particularly if you can score a bonus compass when you explore. The chance of getting an arrow or a jewel is then 7/10, allowing you to use the idol slot to get the other, taking an assistant and moving your glass a second step for those valuable coins.

Multiplayer Variants:

In a 2-player game, the main thing to be wary of is a potential assistant race, though this mostly only matters if the coin assistant is available. If Player 1 takes compasses, they are likely going to explore; this potentially gives them the edge. Take a research resource first, as per usual, and see what their second move is, and if they get what they need from exploration. Then choose between exploring, coins, or the other research resource based on whether a) the site they found is one you will be happy enough taking next round, and b) you prefer an assistant this round, or more cards.

In 3- or 4- player games there is generally less to worry about in the first round. Since players tend to hit the camps first you will likely explore before others do, getting your pick of site bonuses and first crack at assistants. If multiple players explore, the entire better for you, as you will also have first pick of sites and remaining guardian's next round.

Player 3

Starting Resources: 2 coins, 1 compass

Summary: Hoard Compasses!

First Glance: While apparently similar to Player 2, just with an extra coin, there is a crucial difference: they will not go first next round. This might suggest they should explore as well, so there are at least two discovered Level I dig sites next round, and thus they will be guaranteed access to one. The problem with that is that it will always be the less useful site that Player 2 leaves for you, possibly a fairly useless one for round 2 research. A better option is... to aim instead for a Level II site in round 2.

In More Depth: Does that sound ambitious? It is, but highly effective. The sacrifice is not exploring this round and hoarding compasses. If you can pull it off, though, it's worth it because you can hit that Level II site again when you go first in round 3, and thus will have more resources overall by that point. In the first round, this means investing in specific cards: you need compasses (such as Steam Boat, or Rough Map) and ideally a cheap card that gives double-travel symbols (like Gold Pan or Sturdy Boots). I hope that gain a step towards your first assistant as well; a travel assistant is ideal, since they can help you move both rounds, smoothing out the travel symbol challenge.

This means prioritizing coins camp (if it is still available), compasses (unless you can buy tools worth 2 or 3 next round), and whatever research resource will not require you to spend a compass this round (pretty much in that order). It also means keeping an eagle eye out for items that you need, and snapping them up as they come by.

In addition, sometimes? No items come along that will help you and you are blocked from the compass camp, so there is virtually no chance of getting the 6 compasses you need. In that case, pivot your plan. Explore this round, try to get an assistant, and take whatever free dig site Player 2 gives you in round 2 and explore again. Do not get so stuck on the ideal plan that you do not recognize it will not work until it is too late.

Snake Variation: Honestly, not much. Level II site rewards are actually easier to make the most of in rounds 2 and 3 (i.e., on the lower half of the research track) on Snake than they are on Bird, so this is an ideal tactic whenever possible.

Multiplayer Variants:

This is easier to execute in 3-player, where it is unlikely that you will be blocked from any camp sites if you are not exploring, even if your second move is not to a camp that helps this round. If for some reason **nobody** explores in the first round **or** buys any cards in their first two turns, you will be forced to use a 2-foot location. Follow the priority of coins>compass>other spending on what is available.

In 4-player, this gets tricky. You definitely want to buy specific cards, and you cannot control when they come out, but you also do not want to be stuck taking two 2-foot locations, so generally you will not want to buy a card before your first move. (If others are on a buying spree, this may give you leeway, but be cautious.) Best case, everyone else will explore with his or her second move, but you cannot be sure. If you do not have a camp to move your second archaeologist to that will gain you resources, (2 coin cards for a coin camp is a pointless move), explore instead. As above, do not hesitate to pivot if the plan is not working.

Player 4

Starting Resources: 1 coin, 2 compass

Summary: Be Opportunistic!

First Glance: This is the only start that is guaranteed a first-round explore, even with a 1-compass hand; this compensates for potentially getting locked out of as many as three camp sites before your first turn. Consequently, your first move should nearly always be to a remaining campsite, since the chances are strong, you will be blocked out of all single-foot options by your second turn. You might buy a card in between this move and your explore action, but almost never before moving at all (unless at least 2 other players bought cards as well).

In More Depth: I started the article commenting that your opening choices should seem simple, but rarely are. In addition, in the case of being Player 4, they are even more

constrained! However, it does not mean you should not think them through -- it means you have to think a little differently. Unlike other players, you will be focused less on setting an objective for yourself at the outset, and more about making the most of what opportunities present themselves as the round unfolds.

Naturally, you still need to do your initial assessments of cards and assistants -- as they are when play reaches you, and bearing in mind that as several players could be ahead of you in the assistant race. (Also: do this every turn, because better cards or assistants may be revealed, and you want to keep your options open to seize whatever comes your way.)

Next, you should look over the unexplored site bonus tiles before making your first move, because which one you aim for may effect which campsite you take:

- If you have one compass in hand, you'll want to explore a site with a compass bonus, to maximize the chance you can take an assistant if you choose to do so.
- If you have two compasses, look for an upgrade site bonus. If there's one you can travel to, consider taking the campsite that is apparently "useless" for research this round, because the upgrade will turn it into one you can use! (Tablets>arrow on Bird Temple, arrow>jewel on Snake)

If there was a card rush among other players, and there are extra campsites open, you will need to do a little more assessment. Here is how I would approach whichever sites are left open to you:

- If coins is free, I think I would always go there first. Buying cards first round is indispensable.
- If compass camp is free, and you have a one-Fear hand... it may occur that you could actually explore a Level II site this round. **Do not.** It does give you a guaranteed assistant, but you will not have much control over which one, and without the coins assistant there is a good chance you will be unable to buy any cards. As a result, given that you likely will not get to that site again until round 4, your mid-game is going to tank.
- On the other hand, if the compass site is open and there is a great opening artifact, most likely nobody else is going for it! Take your shot.
- If a "useful" research resource is available, this is the best choice after coins. Then you can aim for a compass site bonus (if you do not have a spare) or else a coin bonus to buy more or better cards.

Bird/Snake Variations: On Bird, it is usually tablets and another camp that is open, and except in the upgrade scenario mentioned above, it is probably the other one that you want, whatever it is. On Snake, though, arrows will likely be free, and if you have a 2-compass, hand and can visit a bonus-compass site, go arrows and use your idol slot for tablets. See the section on Player 1 about the advantages of advancing your glass two steps on Snake.

Okay, that is it for me! Do any of these suggestions strike you as confusing, or wrong? Do you have any favorite opening strategies? A particular turn order you prefer to start with? Fire away!

Advanced Strategy Tips

Just wanted to add some advanced tips here.

- Learn from others

The main way that I got better was to watch full game replays when I lost to see what other players did well and what I missed. Most of what I learned after the fact was how I did not move fast enough for the things I wanted.

- Travel quickly and wisely,

you should have a game plan of where you want to travel before the next round even starts. That means knowing what travel icons you will likely have so you can make the journey and making sure you get there first if you really need it.

- Gold is king

what really made me take a step up from 70-80 point scores into the 90s and 100s is doing more deck building. To build a good deck, you typically need gold (or compasses). The 2 gold assistant is by far the best one imo and if it is available on round 1, try your best to be the first to claim it. I never have a bad game if I get the 2 gold assistant on round 1.

- Don't assume you will have time or opponents will be rational

I have had many situations where I thought I would be able to travel to a spot because it made no sense for my opponent to go there only for them to go there anyway. This happens a lot more with weaker players, but you should make sure that if you need something, do not take unnecessary risks. This also happens in round 5 where I think I can buy an artifact a bit later only for my opponents to buy it before me even though it does not work as well for them.

- Be careful with your item slots

unless you have Stone Key, I always leave at least 1 item slot free. Exploring without an item slot open puts you in a vulnerable position since you can often struggle to kill the guardian. I usually refrain from travel if I have used all my slots and instead buy artifacts with my extra compasses.

- General timing

On Bird Temple, there are general benchmarks for where you should be at each stage. By round 2 you should have both assistants. By the end of round 4, you should have gotten at least 1 assistant upgraded and your glass right before the draw a card bit otherwise it will take too many resources for you to make it up and get a good score. I have had games where I have finished all research by round 4, which is an extremely good place to be.

- Go the long way not the short way

Part of making more resources in this game is going circuitous routes to get what you need. So if for example you need an arrow to kill a guardian do not just immediately use an item

slot to get it. Maybe the best way is to buy tablets instead, use that to upgrade your assistant, which gives you an extra arrow. This means that you advanced up a research space as well as got what you needed.

- Kill guardians last

unless you need the guardian boon like the card draw one or for travel, kill monsters last. That is because killing monsters lowers your available resources and does not offer anything immediately in return. You want to have as many resources as possible so you have the most options. Only spend resources if it moves you up the track (which gives you stuff) or you really need a particular travel spot, item or artifact.

- Use everything

if you have a hand with 2 fears, find a way to make that work for you - campsite for a jewel for instance or the Guardian's Ocarina so you can use your fears to travel - if you have a pickaxe or something that requires a resource, make sure you are able to take advantage of it. You should aim to never keep cards between rounds. It is a big loss if you have a card that you cannot use in your hand. It is like you played a round with 4 not 5 cards.

- Understand your deck composition

this is where it gets a bit advanced and you need some experience. You should aim to make your deck work with your assistants intelligently. If for instance you have a pickaxe and trowel, make sure your assistants give you compasses. If you have, coin assistants make sure your items give you compasses. If you are taking in loads of fears, go the card draw or exile assistant. I think the exile assistant is playable. Never your first pick up, but it can be a decent 2nd one if are traveling often to fear sites and it gives an extra compass once upgraded.

Trap Items

There are a few cards, which I consider to be traps and rarely ever pick up.

Precision Compass - It is too expensive, only gives 1 point at the end, and bloats your deck. It is also a bad pick up early since you have fewer artifacts to choose from and a bad pick up late because of its high cost and lack of replayability.

Machete - I also never buy this. It is one of the most poorly designed cards imo. It should be 4-2 or 3-1 since the exile a card ability is a soft bonus.

Ostrich/Sea Turtle - Not great for what they offer. The Automobile and Steam Boat are better and the Pack Donkey/Horse are stronger for draw. Draw in general is not strong in this game unless you deck build carefully which makes them items for advanced players that can manage their deck well.

Trowel - Pickaxe is one of the best cards because it gives you two versatile resources. Trowel is a 1-1. You can interact with a tablet and an arrowhead with upgrades and it also helps kill more guardians and pay for artifacts. Jewels have few purposes other than to

move up the track.

Revolver - One of the worst items in the game imo. The biggest problem is that it does not create resources. Killing guardians should be secondary to generating raw resources. Revolver does not generate any. I find I use it for travel at the end of games sometimes just as proof of how useless a card it is. This should have cost a coin to kill the monster and be 4-2. I will only buy this as part of some intricate play with the Artifact that puts this on top of your deck so you can get a cheap monster kill the turn you buy it by drawing a card.

Airplane - Okay hear me out... I do not think the card is bad. It is just not worth destroying your early game for. I see some players use their turn 1 to throw all their gold at buying this first. I do not think it is good enough to be worth doing that for. You will find that the most annoying thing about it is that it only provides 2 not 3 compasses. I think this is best bought when it is natural to do so either with the help of the 2 gold assistant or the item-buying tier 1 square. Do not wreck your turn 1 strategy just to buy this. You end up basing your whole game around it and cap out at about 80 points.

Trap Assistants

Gold>Arrow assistant - This is one of the biggest traps and one I see a lot of even veteran players fall in. It looks very tempting to pick it up on round 1 because it could help you kill a guardian that turn but it ends up taking up all your gold and causing your deck to be very small and ultimately weak. I will only pick this one up if I have the gold assistant or heavy gold items like gold pan or watch. It can be bought as a second assistant if your deck/assistant allows, never as a first.

Shopping assistant - The guy that allows you to buy an artifact or an item. It looks flexible on paper, in practice; it is slow, cumbersome and often useless. Resources are key. You want your assistant to give you travel symbols or icons and this does neither.

Underrated items

Whip - One of the best items in the game imo. It gives you effectively 4 compasses for just 2 gold and replaces itself with a new high value artifact in the process. I do not mind picking this up on turn 1 while others might overlook it. If you do not have a good artifact to buy on turn 2, use it for travel and it will come back around in turn 3 or 4 when there are good artifacts to buy. Being able to snipe a valuable artifact the moment it shows up like Guiding Skull or Star Charts can be game defining and this lets you do it quickly and sneakily too sometimes.

Bow and Arrows/Brush - At the higher levels, the strength of these cards is known, but these are two of the best cards in the game. They can create 3 compasses, which is amazing return, and convert 1-1 for coins - points. I slightly deprioritize these in round 1 but from round 2 onwards, they are very high priority buys.

Sturdy Boots - A surprisingly versatile card good at all stages of the game. It is primarily used for its two car symbols which is very good value for 1 gold. This card is close to S Tier on the Snake Temple where it can travel to a tier 1 site.

Hot Air Balloon - This is often put as a top tier card but I would argue it is the best item in the game (maybe behind Dog). I will forgo travel on the first turn going first to buy just two cards - Dog and Hot Air Balloon. It just accelerates your development so quickly for such a low cost. Always aim to travel to a tier 2 site with it.