

Tips for Your Survival in “Age of Darkness”

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These tips build on the “Tips for Your First Encounters with 'The Rivals for Catan.'” Most of the general tips for the Theme Games presented there also apply when playing with the new sets. Therefore, here we will only address the specifics of these new sets. The tips for “The Rivals for Catan” can be found here:

<http://www.catan.com/game/rivals-catan#tips-and-variants>

The Era of Intrigue

There are 2 main strategies a player can pursue in this set: obtaining gold via the *Church* and divesting the opponent of units, or obtaining cards faster via the *Temple* and using wool for trading.

- *Production boosters* are particularly interesting as your starting cards, because the building costs for city expansions in most cases include at least two resources of the same type. During the game, *Reiner the Miller* and the *Sacrificial Site* offer you attractive trading options for grain and wool, respectively.
- *Production boosters* for ore and brick support the *Church* strategy, while *production boosters* for lumber and grain support the *Temple* strategy. Depending on the card you find in the first stack, you can opt for one of these strategies.
- If you find a *Grain Mill* and a *Scout* in the first stack, you should take them both. Having two fields regions adjacent to a *Grain Mill* and, above the two fields regions, the region expansions *Reiner the Miller* and the *Abbey Brewery* offers you great flexibility when trading and when competing for the trade advantage and the strength advantage. In this case, early spending of resources to be able to search through the theme stacks pays off, even if you have to keep the *Abbey Brewery* in your hand for a couple of rounds, until your first city is built.
- The *Abbey*, which allows you to build the *Bishop's See* without the *Church*, is also a good starting card.
- As soon as you have the possibility to choose cards from the theme stacks, the *Pilgrimage Site* is a good first choice. After you have built your first city, you run the risk to lose cards from your hand by means of the *Religious Dispute*, and since the *Pilgrimage Site* allows you to immediately replenish your hand after losing any of the cards in your hand, it frees you from the risk of having to begin your turn without cards in your hand.
- If you are not a very experienced player, you better not use the *Master of the Brotherhood*. This card's function is meant to be used by seasoned players in the Tournament Game; furthermore, the *Master of the Brotherhood* and the *Abbey* are mutually exclusive. In the Theme Game, an *Abbey* will mostly be more useful to you.

The Era of Merchant Princes

In this set, everything revolves around maritime trade. Without the trade advantage, it will be hard for you to win the game, and many city expansions, action cards, and events reward the player who has deployed a sizable fleet.

- To be able to build ships, you should secure your lumber and wool supply early on. Later in the game, these resources help you to make use of the two *Residences*. If possible, you should have at least one *trade ship* as a starting card in your hand - two *trade ships* are even better. You should also have a *production booster* for lumber or wool or, alternatively, a *Merchant Caravan* that allows you to build both ships immediately.
- Combined, the *Toll Bridge* and the *Gold Ship* are very good starting cards.
- No luck when choosing the starting stack, and no ship in sight? Finding the *Toll Bridge* is an acceptable alternative. First use your gold to select new cards, then select a *Trading Post* from the theme stacks and place it on the road adjacent to the gold field. That way, once during your turn you can convert gold into the resource from “the other side of the road.”
- Heroes don't have much to do in this set, but if your starting cards include an inexpensive hero, he can provide you with additional resources when the event “Celebration” is rolled, particularly if your opponent is entirely focused on trade.
- Once you are able to search through the theme stacks, your best choice would be to take the *Ship Builder*, who has two useful functions related to ships. The second best card would be one of the two *Trading Posts*, which you then place adjacent to your gold field.

- Build at least one of the two *Residences*. Because of its progress point and victory point, at first glance the *Paper Merchant's Residence* may seem much more attractive, but you can also benefit greatly from the *Cloth Merchant's Residence*: it helps you when competing for the trade advantage, and using the *Commercial Harbor's* trade function is much more convenient if you only have to discard a trade point instead of a valuable progress point or victory point.

The Era of Barbarians

"The Era of Barbarians" is played very differently from all the other sets you have become acquainted with so far. As a result of the special rules for assembling the event card stack and the rule for returning the *Barbarian Attack* to the event card stack, you constantly have to grapple with barbarian attacks and impending resource loss. Spending some time to figure out the optimal positions for your cards – particularly for your units – will definitely pay off. This set contains another *Relocation* card, so you can change the positions of certain cards if need be.

- Units are particularly important in this game. In addition to fending off the barbarians, *trade ships* can also help you obtain the trade advantage, and each hero of this set has a useful special function.
- If you rely on *trade ships*, you can build your first city early on, because ships cost only lumber and wool. If you rely on heroes, at first you should expand your principality by means of settlements, not cities: heroes need ore and grain, which is why you lack these resources for city building.
- Besides ships or heroes, the *Toll Bridge* is also a good starting card, because you need gold to build some of the city expansions of the set. The *Parish Hall* allows you to specifically search for city expansions whose building costs include gold, but the *Parish Hall* also takes up the building site that otherwise could be occupied by a unit. If you build a *Parish Hall* early on, you should be prepared to remove it later, when you need the space for a unit.
- Your city should definitely contain 4 units, one of which should make the other 3 units more effective against the barbarians - that is, your city should either contain 3 *trade ships* and the *Caravel* or *Arnd the Strategist* as one of 4 heroes.
- You don't have to build the *Castle* – the faceup expansion card of this set – as early as comparable cards in the other Theme Games. Action cards requiring the *Castle* often don't become interesting until later in the game. At the beginning, you'll be able to defend yourself by means of your units, and after a victory over the barbarians, you can either take resources or collect victory points on the *Triumph Card*.
- Since the *Castellan* can help you to obtain resources on regions adjacent to the *Castle*, you should plan well where to build the *Castle*. When building the *Castle*, you should also take into account which cards you want to build afterwards and which resources you'll need for it.
- Since victory points on the *Triumph Card* do not contribute to the barbarians' strength, you can accumulate them without risk.

Duel of the Princes

The possibility to use 3 out of 6 sets makes the "Duel of the Princes" more varied and dynamic than when using only the 3 sets of the base game. Although the rules provide an element of randomness regarding the selection of the sets, you and your opponent are certainly free to determine all three sets by mutual agreement: if there is a set that none of you likes, nobody will force you to use it, unless you are participating in an official tournament or playing online, where the rules are preprogrammed.

- For your first "Duel" games, before the game starts you should definitely review the cards used - otherwise, since only part of the cards from each set is used in the "Duel," your experience with the Theme Game might induce you to wait for a certain card to appear that actually isn't part of the mix.
- A combination of "The Era of Gold" and "The Era of Merchant Princes" is likely to result in a particular exciting competition for the - usually game-winning - trade advantage. Things might get a little "destructive" when both "The Era of Turmoil" and "The Era of Barbarians" are used for the "Duel," so you should ask yourself whether this is to your partner's liking.
- If you play with three thematically very different sets, it is often beneficial to focus on only one of them, so that you can fully use its possibilities.

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