

THE OLD KING'S CROWN INTRODUCTORY STRATEGY GUIDE



The Old King's Crown is a deep strategy game with asymmetric-leaning factions, hidden information and a large variety of ways to combine and synergise your actions throughout the game's seasons. For some, discovering its many strategic secrets is best experienced through trial and error, and discovery-through-play. However, for other players who wish to go in less blind, we've put together this guide to help you find your footing in the kingdom.

Whether this is your first foray into the game, or you've wrapped your first session and are now interested in learning more, hopefully you will find valuable information here. This is by no means an exhaustive guide, but the advice here should give you some valuable objectives to keep in mind whilst playing the game, regardless which faction you choose to play.



PLAYER COUNT, PLAYER COUNT, PLAYER COUNT

The Old King's Crown rewards and requires different considerations at different player counts. Here is a breakdown of each:

Two Players



This head-to-head duel arguably allows players to play at their most aggressive. With two players contesting three Regions each Round, you have room to press the advantage with greater certainty. If your opponent is on the ropes, you might want to throw more resources into Clashes to lock them out of two or even all three Regions, and their related bonuses and scoring opportunities. However, be careful to not overextend as they may return the favour in kind.
At two players, you'll also have the whole Kingdom Card market to share between you. This means that even if you don't get your first pick during the Bidding Phase, you'll likely get your second. That said, there will be no other players to police or disrupt your opponent's Kingdom Card synergies, so make sure you consider stealing from them instead, especially if they have a lightly defended threat that is causing you trouble.

Finally, make sure to consider and respond to your opponent's moves. If they have purchased a card from their Site of Power, consider how that will impact the next Round. If they are just one or two Influence (◉) ahead, consider staying behind them in score so you can snatch or maintain the initiative next Round. Keep a close eye on their cards in the Lost Pile and plan around them.

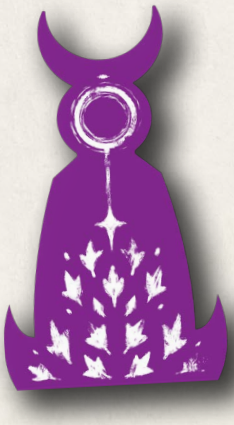


Three Players



Resources are a little tighter and the gamestate potentially a little wilder. Don't be afraid of petitioning another player to help disrupt the leader, whether it's coordinating on what order the Clashes might resolve or how to pick apart a strong position in the game's political Councils. Take note if your opponents are looking to contest the same assets, perhaps you want to steer clear and focus your attention on parts of the table that are less fought over. In this way, you'll have more resources to use for other Actions and are less likely to suffer expensive losses. And if your rivals aren't at each other's throats, use some of the more cunning Kingdom Cards and abilities in the game, to ensure that they end up in mutually destructive Clashes.

Finally, being last on the Order Track may be daunting, as that means you likely have the least (or tied-for-the-least) Influence. However, by acting last you'll have maximum visibility on your opponents' actions, as well as controlling the order in which Regions resolve.







Four Players

This is the game at its maximum player count, and at its most complex and wild. There will be a lot of abilities and attacks being exchanged across the table. It may feel overwhelming and like you have less control than you'd like. However, the game can be played at a very high level at four players, you need only look at an invitational tournament run earlier in the year for examples of whip-smart strategies.

The Old King's Crown is a game that constantly brings you into conflict with other players, so at this maximum player count your strategy should be built around surviving and thriving in the conflict-heavy gamestate. You should strategise and plan around insulating from harm and disruption, minimise your risks, let the table eat each other whilst you quietly feast, and prepare to take big swings when the opportunities arise.

Don't risk your powerful but fragile cards in Clashes without pairing them with some protection. Try to prioritise advancing your gamestate rather than chasing Influence, especially in the early game. Councils, cards at your Site of Power and Kingdom Cards that return guaranteed value are all worth their weight in gold.

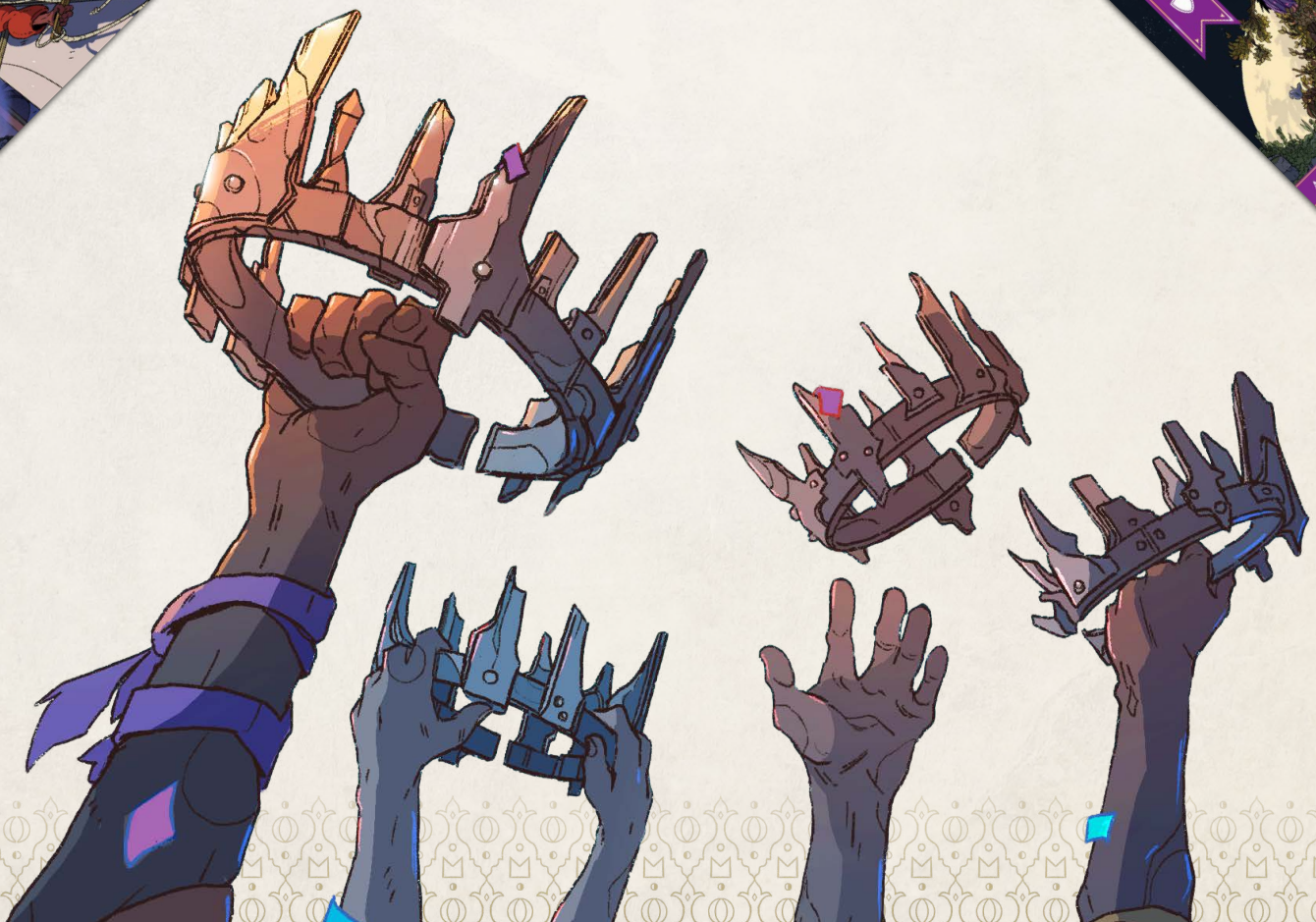
Finally, whilst tracking the individual power each player has access to may be too intimidating at first, try to look at the broader conflict and flashpoints. Determine which Region will be most hotly contested this Round, which Councils are becoming dangerously full of votes, which player has built the most threatening tableau of assets in their play area, and so on!











YOUR BASIC DECK



Next, let's get acquainted with your cards and how you might use them to teach your rivals a thing or two!

Each of the four Factions in the base game of The Old King's Crown have an identical 14-card Deck, made up of Basic Faction Cards. The Faction's asymmetry then comes from how they interact with and leverage these cards, as well as from additional Faction-specific Site of Power cards, Tactics and Kingdom's Favour.

Getting to know the make up of the Basic Deck is a key way to improve your skills and the first step to mastering some of the more advanced strategies in the game. Here is a break down of your cards:

Ruse!



Despite having a Strength of **0** this card is one of your most versatile cards. It has the Invulnerable (🛡) Trait meaning that it cannot be Eliminated from Clashes but even more importantly it has two very useful Commands that it can use during a Clash.

Ambush - Add another card to the Clash! This allows you to use your Ruse! (⚜) to first recon and then, if the conditions are favourable, safely add in a new card. The applications of this are vast!

Retreat - Safely leave the Clash, taking any cards and pieces you have in that Region back to your Hand or player board, respectively. This includes your Herald, allowing you to remove it before it might be stolen from!



Use this card to scope out danger and escape if necessary, allowing you to rescue your cards and pieces, for use down the line.

Trader



Another Strength **0** card, though unlike the Ruse! (⚜), the Trader (♟) lacks any defensive Traits like Invulnerable (🛡) or Resilient (⛑) This makes it a lot more vulnerable in Clashes. However, it has powerful benefits to counter these weaknesses.

Rally - Like the Ruse! (⚜) this card too has a Command. **Rally** lets you move Active Cards back to your Hand.



An Active card is one that is face-up next to any Region on the Map. They are the cards that you have sent out to take part in dangerous Clashes!

This means you can use cards in Clashes and then bounce them back to Hand, allowing them to be used later in the Round. Very nice card economy! And in the Trader's (♟) case it lets you do this to two cards, including itself. Even better!

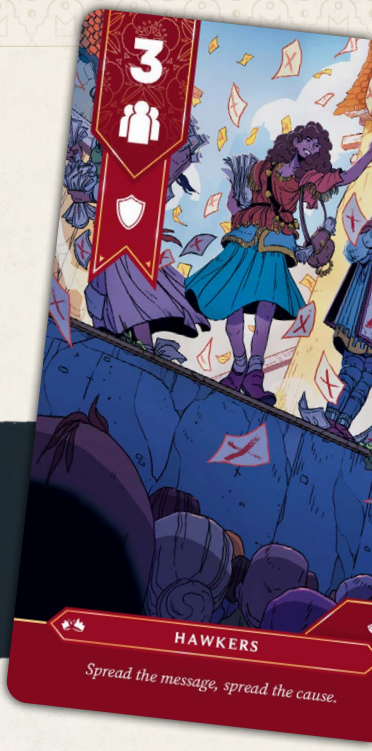
Additionally, with two Votes (🔨) and two Lore (📜), this card is brilliant at providing value outside of direct conflicts. Use its 🔨 to give you new bonuses in a Council of your choice or trade this card in to generate two 📜 to go towards buying new powerful cards from your Site of Power.

Follower

Whilst Followers (👥) may initially appear weak due to their low Strength, they have very important uses throughout the game. Your Followers also have the Invulnerable (🛡) Trait, meaning they cannot be Eliminated during Clashes. In games with higher player counts, instances of **Deadly** Command (see Agents (🕵) below) will likely be more common, so although the Strength of a Follower isn't likely to outright win a Clash by itself, if your opponents end up Eliminating one another, you may be able to claim victory by being the last card standing!



With their 1🔨, Followers (👥) can also be used outside of Clashes to help bolster your roster with new cards from your Site of Power, whilst thinning your Deck of these lower value cards. However, be wary as they have one more trick up their sleeve. They act as a direct counter to Agents (🕵)! See directly below for more info!



Agent

Your Agent (🕵) is the most lethal card in your roster of basic cards. Able to Eliminate all undefended cards in its Region using its **Deadly** Command, a well placed use of your Agent can have disastrous consequences for your opponents.



However, watch out! Whilst your Agent (🕵) is an incredibly potent tool in your arsenal, they also have a glaring weakness.

- If there are any Active opponent 👥 in the Clash, Eliminate this card.

All Agents (🕵) in the Basic Decks are susceptible to being eliminated by cards with the Follower (👥)Archetype, which are some of the most numerous cards in your opponents' Decks. As a result tread carefully with these cards, especially at higher player counts where there will likely be a lot of Followers (👥) running around. Use your Ruse! (🎭) card or other tricks to protect your Agent (🕵) and make sure that you land those lethal blows.

Quite right! And, if I may, your Agent (🕵) also has two 🔨, making them great assets in a Council until such a time when you're ready to risk them in Clashes!

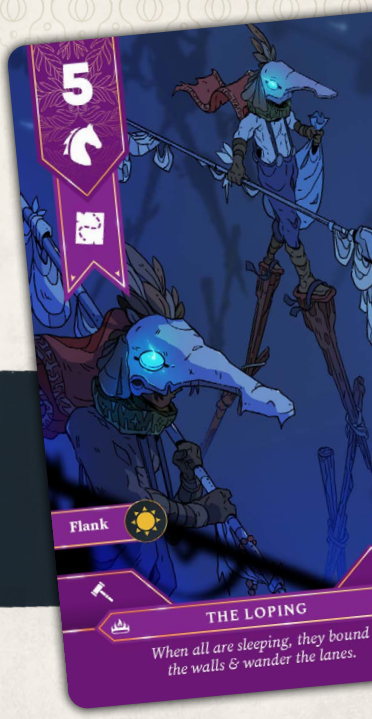


Cavalry

Your Cavalry (♞) card is the most mobile card in your opening Deck. Use its **Flank** Command to move it to an unresolved Region during Clashes. Flanking your card to another Region allows you to bolster and consolidate your Strength in that Region, whilst escaping from Clashes that have become too dangerous or you have no intention of winning!



Plan wisely! Having your Cavalry (♞) be revealed in the first Region to be resolved in a Round will ensure you get the most out of its ability. However, take care! If your Cavalry (♞) is caught in the last Region to be resolved, it will have no more unresolved Regions to Flank into and so have nowhere else to move to, making it a juicy target for any Agents (🕵) laying in wait.





That's right! Best get a move on!

War Machine

These cards are the ultimate defensive cards. With a respectable **5** Strength they are your strongest Basic Faction Card with the Invulnerable (🛡) Trait. Additionally they have the slow but powerful Command: **Deploy**. This can be activated by having the card in your Hand in Autumn, allowing you to install it in any Region you choose. A Deployed card will remain on the board whilst all other cards are discarded in Winter!



To get the most from your War Machine (🚀), you'll need to plan ahead! Although you can place it in Spring like a normal card, the Deploy Command allows you to place your War Machine (🚀) in a Region in Autumn, contributing its Strength there the next round in addition to any other card placed!

I've read some accounts of enterprising commanders being able to keep their War Machines (🚀) deployed in the field for multiple Rounds by using some inventive tactical tricks. Impressive!



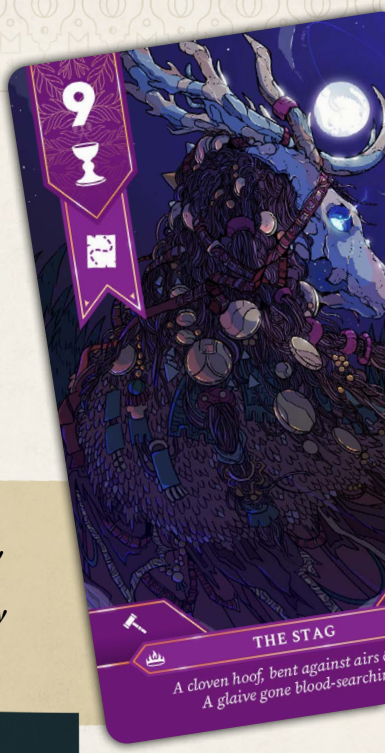


Captain

Your Captains (♜) are arguably your most versatile cards. These cards are able to fulfil a variety of roles due to them having both **1**⚒ and **1**🗡 along with the Pathfinder (▣) Trait.

With those stats, they are equally as good at Journeying as they are Governing in the Councils. Additionally, with their higher than average Strength, Captains (♜) make for very competitive Bidding cards, often able to ensure you get an early pick of the available Kingdom Cards.







The Pathfinder (▣) Trait means they are real good at Journeying! Instead of being moved to the Lost Pile, they find their way to your Discard Pile, ready to venture forth once more. They share this Trait with your Cavlary (🐎) cards covered earlier, making these folks great for generating valuable 🗡!

Be cautious using your Captains (♜) in Clashes however, as they have no defense against being Eliminated! They are best fielded when your opponents' Agents (🕵) and Heirs (♛) are out of the picture. Which brings us neatly to...



Heir

Your Heir (♛) represents the head of your faction and always starts the game in your Hand. It is highest strength card in your opening Deck. However, arguably even stronger is its **Rally (Self)** Command. This allows you to return this card to your Hand after using it in Clashes each Round... so long as you're able to keep it safely on the field.



Your Heir (♛) is more hardy than your other cards due to its Resilient (🛡) Trait. This means it's moved to your Discard Pile rather than the Lost Pile when Eliminated. However, it's not all roses, as its Rally Command cannot be triggered from the Discard Pile!





Capital! Now that we've discussed the differing player counts and the cards that will get you going in your endeavours to claim the crown, let's jump into some more specific strategic considerations!

GENERAL STRATEGY TIPS

Watch out for Attrition!

In The Old King's Crown, running out of cards in your Deck can have lasting and dangerous consequences! Each time you must draw from your Deck and there are no cards remaining there, you must shuffle your Discard Pile to form a new Deck. However, each time this happens, you suffer the effects of Attrition, reducing your Hand Size by one!

Since your Faction Cards have many different applications, a reduced Hand Size means you have a smaller pool of cards to Bid and Occupy Kingdom Cards with, use in Clashes, and to Journey & Govern with. Careful management of your Deck and Hand of cards is vital to ensure you have the resources you need, especially relative to your opponents, who will also be fighting to preserve their supply lines.

However, there are several means available to you that help to prevent Attrition that you should be aware of.

1 Lowlands Location Rewards

The Lowlands might seem unassuming and less glamorous than some of the other Regions on the Map but it is vital to controlling your supply of cards and starving your opponents of theirs.

Both of the Location Rewards in the Lowlands Region provide means of staving off Attrition. The Shrine Location Reward allows you to cycle cards you've used this Round back into your Deck (instead of being discarded at the end of the Round), whilst the Necropolis allows you to rescue cards already in your Discard Pile, bringing them right back into your Hand and into play, ready for combos and mischief! Remember, the more cards that are in your Hand at the end of the Round, the fewer cards you need to draw from your Deck at the start of the next Round!



Control your card supply and deny your opponents the chance to do the same!

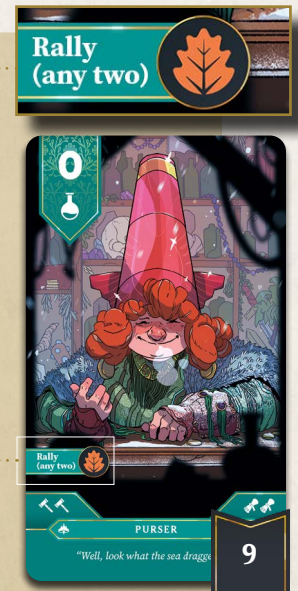


2 Rally your Cards

As we covered in the Basic Deck breakdown, certain cards will have the **Rally** Command. This means that so long as your card remains by a Region come Autumn Phase of the Round, you'll potentially be able to return it to your Hand again.

In simple terms this means: use a card to fight for control of a Region, then use it again to do something more economically-focused such as Governing or Journeying, or hold them for the next Round in your Hand. This kind of card economy, squeezing the most from your multi-use cards, is at the heart of a strong gameplan.





Kingdom Card Corner



Kingdom Cards are neutral cards you'll be bidding on, stealing from opponents and adding to a tableau of your available abilities each Round. Each one is unique, each one bends the rules of the game or provides powerful bonuses. Creating synergies between these cards and your Faction's own strengths and weaknesses is key to victory!



Here are just a few Kingdom Cards that focus on Hand management, card control and keeping Attrition at bay.



Adventuring Party - So long as you have this card, all your cards gain the Pathfinder ( ) Trait. As we covered when discussing your Captain ( ) and Cavalry ( )Basic Faction Cards, this Trait means that cards that would normally be removed to the Lost Pile (potentially for good) now instead go to your Discard Pile when they Journey.

Journeying is how you acquire new specialist cards for your Faction, don'tchaknow!

So keep your Deck size healthy and give yourself the chance to rescue your Journeying cards from the Discard Pile. If only there was a way to do that...

Forged Royal Pardons - This card allows you to move a card from your Discard Pile back to your Hand in Spring, providing you with another card to use during your Journey and/or Govern Actions this turn, or to add into a Clash using any **Ambush** Commands you may have access to. Nice!





Mysterious Benefactor - This card allows you to ignore the ill effects of Attrition once when you discard it. Additionally, since it goes in your Supply and doesn't need to be Occupied full-time by one of your cards, it puts less strain on your card economy. That's a winner in my book!

The common thread between all these tools, is that they pull cards (either Active or from your Discard Pile) back to your Hand/Deck before you Draw Cards and risk incurring Attrition.



Right you are! I always say a full Hand is a fearsome Hand!

Quite quite - let's move onto our next topic.



Visibility is King!

At the heart of The Old King's Crown there lies fog-of-war, represented mechanically by the blind bidding and placement of cards that players take part in. This means that often plans will be contingent on speculating on hidden information. This can potentially feel intimidating for new players, so here are some pointers for making sure your spies have the best chance of correctly countering your opponents.

1 Public Information

All face-up cards are public information, including your Discard Pile and those of your opponents. Feel free to check them to help you deduce what cards could be in play.

As the game progresses players will have more and more revealed cards in play, whether they are Occupying Kingdom Cards on their Player Board, Deployed into a Region or holding court in the kingdom's Councils. Use this to track the movements and positions of opponents cards.

Additionally, the Lost Pile too is also open to search at any time, which is great for reminding yourself of any potential threats that have been removed. Speaking of which...



2 Track Agents

As covered, each Basic Deck has one extremely dangerous Agent (🜲) card in it, which can use its **Deadly** Command to Eliminate all cards without protection in a Region. If these have been Eliminated themselves or are perhaps leveraging their powerful two 🔨 in Councils, you have more freedom to risk your more fragile cards in Clashes. If all Agents (🜲) are not accounted for, or if you're playing a Faction that has access to more cards with **Deadly**, plan accordingly with additional protection for your cards if able.



3 Ruses!

Similarly, you have access to a Ruse! (🜁) card that lets you scope out danger in a Region. Use this to get visibility on opponents' cards and if it's too dangerous, use **Retreat** to return any cards and pieces you have in the Region to safety.



Kingdom Card Corner

These Kingdom Cards are great for helping with dealing with threats in the fog-of-war.

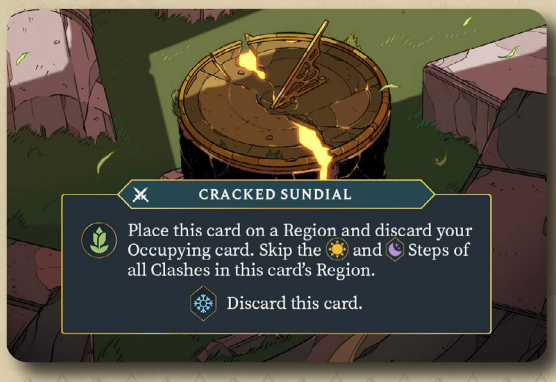


Smuggler's Pass - This unassuming card might not seem overly powerful to the uninitiated but it allows you to not only preserve vulnerable cards but get a great tempo advantage by being allowed to Journey immediately with that card.

If you're going to lose in a Region, why not lose in style: save all your cards and pieces with the free Retreat and generate to buy new cards with the free Journey! Winner winner!

The Innkeeper - A fantastic asset for spying on your opponents' movements, this card lets you peek at face-down cards during Spring, before any Clashes have taken place, and then rearrange your forces with that new knowledge. With some careful setup, this card can be turned into the ultimate trap.





Cracked Sundial - This one-use card lets you force all players to skip the and Step in a Clash. This is where all the wild powers and abilities are triggered. Use this to nullify whatever threat emerges suddenly from the fog.

In conclusion, make your best guess and always have a backup plan for the worst outcome. There will be times when you do not know what cards are in an opponent's Hand. At times like this use the surrounding gamestate to make educated inferences: if a Region is full of Heralds crowding on a single Location, the stakes are very high and so you can safely assume a lot of players' most powerful cards and potentially supporting abilities will be making an appearance there. What do your opponents want most, what assets do they have to make that happen and how can you plan around that?

And remember to look them in the eye. There be bluffing and brinkmanship abroad in these here waters. Use the tools at your disposal, get a read on their tells and their motives. Look at how they place their Herald, the order in which they place their cards, zero in on where they might be weakest. Keep it clean, no need to be mean but there's no harm in a little good ol' detectiving.

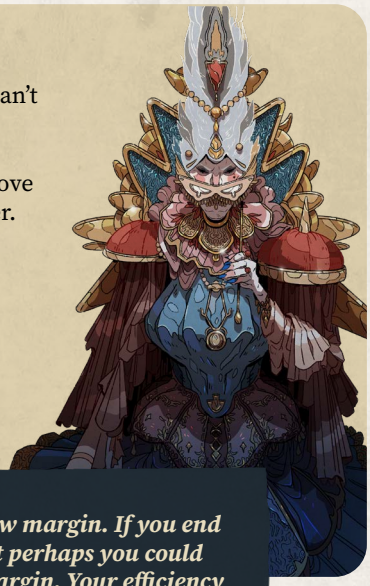
Oh! I like his style.

Ahem, quite. Let's get back on track shall we?

Develop your Gameplan Outside of Clashes

Each Round you will be fighting over the three Regions of the Map, with the winner gaining ◉ and a special bonus for each Location they claim. These Clashes will be fiercely contested and, especially at higher player counts, success will not be guaranteed. However, there are plenty of other ways of securing advantages throughout a match, and especially at higher player counts, you'll need to take advantage of this if you want to stay competitive.

1 Make the Most of Losing Clashes



You won't always be able to win every Clash you take part in but that doesn't mean you can't gain strategic momentum and value out of the situation.

- **Flank!** - As we covered in the Basic Deck review, certain cards have the ability to move to a different Region during a Round, abandoning one Region to Strengthen another.
- **Eliminate!** - If you can't win a Clash, perhaps try and take out some vulnerable opponents' cards in the process.
- **Retreat!** - Use a Ruse! (🜁) card or another means to gain this Command to safely withdraw your assets from the Region.

And many other tricks you'll be able to put together using your tableau of abilities and actions to ensure ceding a Region yields some advantages.



Equally, if you are going to win a Clash it's better to win by a narrow margin. If you end up burning a lot of resources to dominate in a Region, consider that perhaps you could have spent them elsewhere and still won, albeit with a narrower margin. Your efficiency will be rewarded down the line!

2 Govern & Journey as Often as you Can

As part of the Autumn Phase, each player is given a free opportunity to Govern and Journey. Additionally, throughout the course of a game, you'll potentially come across a variety of extra ways to gain even more opportunities to Govern and Journey. However, you need to make sure you have cards available, usually in your Hand and, if not that, Active on the board, with which to use for this purpose. This once again stresses the importance of maintaining healthy supply lines and prioritising card economy.



To Govern with a card means to move it into a political Council of your choice. This card must have at least one Vote (🔨). Once in that Council it will remain there until it is removed, granting you a new Action or ability depending on the chosen Council, which gets more powerful the more 🔨 you have there. A word of caution though: having lots of cards in Councils will naturally put a strain on your card economy elsewhere!



To Journey with a card means to move it to the Lost Pile and gain Lore (🖋) equal to the amount of 🖋 the card provides. 🖋 can then be spent there and then to buy new goodies from your Site of Power, or saved up for an even bigger purchase from your site later down the line. Who doesn't love a good shopping trip?





3 More Actions Means More Opportunities

You will begin the game with access to several Actions and abilities, and over the course of the game you will lose access to some and gain new ones in their place. There is no limit to the amount of Actions and abilities you can accrue and broadly the more you have, the more you'll be able to achieve in a given Phase or Round as a whole. So when acquiring Kingdom Cards or HQ Cards from your Site of Power, always consider what new Actions they may add to your tableau.

4 The Benefits of Holding Councils

Each of the three Councils in the game has a unique ability associated with it. By having Votes (🔨) in a Council, usually through slotting your cards there, you have access to that ability. This can put a strain on your card economy, however each ability is powerful and arguably one of the more safe and stable portions of the game. Whilst you can be removed from Councils in a number of ways, in particular when someone claims the Castle Location on the Map, if you build your game plan around having a significant Council presence, it can be very difficult for opponents to completely stamp out your presence. Let's quickly summarise the different Councils:



Council of Relics - A great way to make more ◉ in a single stroke but it all hinges on winning where your Herald is, so you need to have the martial planning to back it up. This is potentially the most unreliable Council but the potential rewards are enormous.

Council of Secrets - Arguably the best Council to focus on when you're concentrating a lot of gains outside of Clashes. This Council's ability essentially allows you to circumnavigate Clashes to still secure the bonuses on Locations but at the cost of it not earning you ◉. A very powerful tool that can give you a lot of options, even if Clashes are not always going your way.

Council of Oaths - The best way to sustain your Supporters' presence on the Map. Use to apply pressure and crowd out your opponents on the Map.



Each Faction begins the game with access to all five of their Supporters. However, each time they are played to the Map, they will be moved to the Lost Pile in Winter. Council of Oaths lets you recall them from that desolate spot!

Despite only adding 1 Strength each in a given Clash, Supporters are, for the most part, considerably more reliable than your cards and are difficult to dislodge from a conflict. Use them to tip the scales of a Clash in your favour.

Who let you back in here?!

Aye! If everyone has battered themselves silly with Eliminate and no cards are left standing in a Clash, any Supporters there are going to be getting the pints in!



Kingdom Card Corner

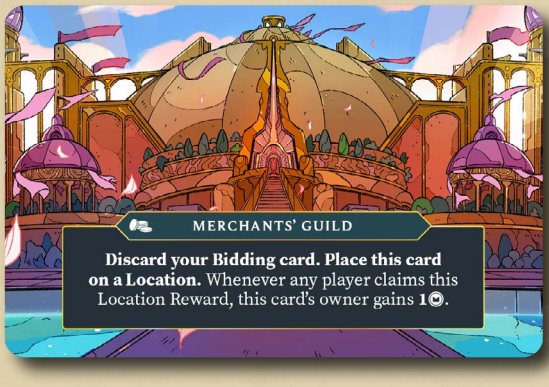
Additionally, there are several Kingdom Cards in the game that allow you an alternative source of Influence (●) and Lore (🖋). A small selection of these include:



Remote Bothies - This versatile Kingdom Card provides means of gaining both Influence (●) & Lore (🖋) in Spring, useful for potentially acquiring a card from your Site of Power before Clashes begin, or providing a consistent source of ●. The choice is yours with the right planning in place!

Monument Builders - If you're playing a Council-focused game, this card complements that approach, allowing you to gain additional ● for consistently having a card there. And, if you can build towards it, it can also provide a huge bonus reward!





Merchant's Guild - Gaining this card early in the game can be a very reliable source of ● for the player who acquires it. Use it on a Location that you plan on claiming regularly or that will see opponents visiting there often. Regardless of who, you'll be the one reaping the rewards!

White Watchtowers - Resolving your Bid first can often be pivotal, and this card helps you do exactly that. It provides additional Strength to your Bidding and Occupying cards, and on top of this, if you are first to resolve your Bid, you gain 1●. Use this card to gain access and hold onto the most sought after Kingdom Cards, all whilst gaining a passive income of ●.



QUICK FIRE TIPS!



Choose your Site of Power cards wisely

During the course of the game, you will be able to spend Lore (🔨) to gain access to Advanced Faction Cards and HQ Cards from your Site of Power. When choosing when and which cards to buy you should consider the current state of the game, including the cards your opponents have access to, and which Kingdom Cards are currently in play. If an opponent has lots of abilities that may Eliminate your cards during Clashes, you may opt to buy cards that have the Invulnerable (🛡) Trait to negate this effect, or instead choose to gain an HQ card which often provides new Actions and abilities outside of Clashes.

Advanced Faction Cards are added directly to your Hand, so purchasing them offers the additional potential benefit of keeping your Hand full and staving off Attrition.

Whilst HQ Cards provide on-going passive abilities, which can be particularly useful in higher player count games as their constant presence and reliability add a great strategic anchor to your plans.



Don't spread yourself too thin in Regions.

Attempting to win in every Region in a Round is incredibly risky and can often lead to disastrous consequences. If you spread yourself too thin by committing your powerful cards to every Region, your opponents may be able to snatch victory away from you, and make your losses even more costly. It is often more beneficial to you to identify a single Region as a priority by identifying which Location Reward would be most useful to you this Round.

Invulnerable protects from all sources of Deadly

The Invulnerable (🛡) Trait negates the effects of all sources of **Deadly** and any other abilities that would Eliminate your cards. At higher player counts, there is likely to be more cards with **Deadly** revealed in Clashes, and so Invulnerable (🛡) cards can be hugely important and can make your final Strength more predictable and reliable to bank on. Use this to maintain a consistent source of Strength in more unpredictable Clashes.



Here the Clans have used the Old King's Shield to negate the effects of the Old King's Spear used by the Uprising, and the Nobility Agent's (🎭) Deadly Command. Pretty clever!

Remember to use all of your Tactics throughout the game

The four Tactics on your Player Board are available to you from the beginning of the game and provide you with four Faction-specific powers that combine the rest of their toolkit. Players, when first learning the game, may be hesitant to use their Tactics for fear of not using them optimally, only for the perfect opportunity to never arise during the game. If you reach the end of the game with any number of your Tactics being unspent, you will have not utilised all of the tools available to you, and as a result may have had a series of Rounds where you are not furthering your gamestate as much as you potentially could. Of course it is a balance of finding the right moment to strike and it may take several games to really start to see the value of each one!





Some Factions have access to Tactics that can be used multiple times before being exhausted, so don't be afraid to use their powerful abilities!

Consider your opponents at all times

This is a game that rewards you for taking into account what your opponent is planning. You might not be able to beat them in a given moment but you can make the most of the situation in other ways. If you can get a measure of them and their intentions you can begin to truly outwit them!

