

# **Root Guide: Chapter 1 –**

## **The Dice, the Board and the Cards.**

So this is my first attempt at ever making a strategy guide for a game, and I hardly know what makes me qualified to do so! I will say though that at this stage I've had a decent number of games of Root, both on my own copy of the game and with the excellent folks on the Root Discord (Woodland Warriors, <https://discord.gg/wXrGwrD>). Still, I wouldn't call myself an expert just yet, so this is what I would say is an “intermediate” guide to Root, with a focus on mainly helping people get into the right mindset for each of the factions.

Which is why for the first part of the guide, I want to focus on none of them at all, instead taking a step back and looking at the few things shared between all factions. For the most part I won't be making huge recommendations on your game play in this section of the guide, as I'll only end up re-iterating them all later when I cover the individual factions. Instead, the intention here is to take a bit of a deeper dive into the mechanics of Root to use as a foundation when going through the factions later.

### **The Dice**

Chances are if you're reading this you already know how the combat system in Root works. If not, it's quite simple, you roll two dice (effectively four sided, actually twelve sided but with only the numbers 0-3 distributed equally) and remove a number of enemy pieces (what is known as a 'hit' in the game's terminology) equal to the result (capped by the number of warriors each player has), with the aggressor (Or the Woodland Alliance) taking the highest result and the defender taking the lowest. This produces some interesting results, which boils down to the few key numbers.

4/16ths of the possible rolls will be even,  
6/16ths of the rolls will result in 1 extra hit on the highest dice  
4/16ths of the rolls will result in 2 extra hits,  
and 2/16ths of the rolls will result in 3 extra hits,  
with an average of 1.25 extra hits.

Now, right off the bat 1.25 extra hits is a pretty good advantage to the attacker. The big crux to this though is that you spent an action to do this combat and trading an action for a unit or two is hardly worth it - if I could trade a Cat warrior for an action I would do so several times every turn. For action-heavy factions like the Riverfolk and the Vagabond who can perform a number of combats each turn fairly easily, however, the math becomes far more skewed towards aggression, so feel free to pick more fights on those factions (yes, including the Riverfolk! Don't think of them as just traders, they can fight too!).

If you're not blessed with a surplus of actions (so the Cats, basically), then factor that in to your calculations when judging whether to move out and attack. Keep your aggression smart: key attacks on undefended and important structures or stopping a force that will destroy something important of yours is a good use of an action, however attacking a few random warriors gets you none of the score that a build would have gotten you instead. Remember: you can always blockade an enemy in their space by just seizing control of it with more units, nullifying that threat. This is especially good against the low unit count Alliance.

## The Board

I'll be talking purely about the autumn map here. I won't discuss the winter map as I've not had many games on it, and the randomisation makes general statements hard to make. I've not played on the beta maps at all either, so nothing on those.

While fairly random looking at start, the autumn map has some odd symmetry to it that can be planned around. A few things are obvious, like the fact that there four clearings of each type, but there are a few things that aren't immediately obvious that can be used in your favour. For example, there is a pattern to each corner of the board: two of the three adjacent clearings share a suit, with a third clearing of that suit two moves away. The third clearing that is adjacent to each corner is a different suit to the other adjacent spaces and the corner itself, and will have another one (if one of the northern clearings) or two (if southern) clearings of the same suit two moves away. This second suit will also be the suit of the opposite corner. Finally, each corner is never convenient to other clearings of the same suit, typically having the nearest two spaces away and the rest three, or in case of the bottom right-hand corner all of them being 3 moves away.

This information is most important for Cats and the Eyrie. Cats can choose to start next to many building spots of a suit they wish to be strong in for crafting, and the Eyrie have a suit in which they can pretty safely place a build card for and be safe for a few rounds before they fall into turmoil. More on all of that though later.

There are a few other basic details to take note of:

<u>Suit</u>	<u>Uncovered Building Slots</u>	<u>Ruins</u>	<u>Paths</u>	<u>River Spaces (Connections)</u>
<b>Fox</b>	5	2	13	0
<b>Rabbit</b>	5	1	11	3 (4)
<b>Mouse</b>	8	1	12	2 (4)
<b>Totals</b>	18	4	18	5 (4)

*Table 1: A summary of the clearings on the autumn board, broken down by suit*

While I don't think we should look too much into the information provided here, there are two things that stand out to me. First, the river runs through almost all of the rabbit clearings and half the mouse clearings but none of the foxes. If you're going for domination with a Riverfolk player in game, keep that in mind. Secondly, the mice are apparently the most industrious species with notably more crafting spots then the other races, so that's a thing to keep an eye on if you want building spots, and also something to watch out for in turn when it comes to Favor cards – it's easier to to get 3 mice crafters and a mouse Favor has more potential damage.

<u>Corner</u>	<u>Uncovered Building Slots Includes Adjacent Territories</u>	<u>Ruins Includes Adjacent Territories</u>	<u>Distance to Opposite Corner Not Including Rivers</u>
<b>North-west</b>	6	1	4
<b>North-east</b>	6	2	3
<b>South-west</b>	6	1	3
<b>South-east</b>	6	2	4

*Table 2: A summary of the corner clearings on the autumn board*

Now corners, on the other hand, are quite fascinating to me as a Cats player because the first decision every Cats player makes is where to start. It's also worth noting that if the Cats aren't in play then the Eyrie get to pick, and as every faction draws their starting 3 cards before their individual setup, Eyrie players have a bit of a decision to make here in terms of picking a territory that gels well with their starting cards. I could talk a lot about the thought I've put into picking starting locations, and I will do so, in my guide for the Cats, but if I go

into a spiel on it here then I'll just end up making this chapter about a full third longer again only to copy and paste it all right into my Cats guide. For now though, just observe that if you count adjacent spaces, the number of building slots in each corner is equal, with the exception that the eastern corners have an extra ruin-covered building slot in the adjacent clearings. Also of interest is the fact that (unless you have riverboats) there is an extra space of movement between the north-west and south-east corners, which can be useful if you're feeling like avoiding your opponent.

There are also a couple of interesting clearings I want to bring up. One is the fox clearing with 5 connections. This is quite the clearing to me, as being so well connected it's quite powerful if you can hold onto it. Not only does it makes the entire south-west section of the map extremely easy to move your troops around, with the exception of the northernmost rabbit clearing every space is within two moves of this fox clearing. This makes it fantastic for reinforcing positions or performing surprise attacks, and in general a great place to park your excess warriors.

There are also two clearings with only two connections, one rabbit (north) and one fox (south-west). These are nice to start next to, as if you can hold the space on the other side of your starting point it's essentially a free clearing that you don't need to defend very hard, just as long as you're keeping an eye on the Vagabond and the Riverfolk.

Finally, the 3 building spot mouse space is quite nice and defensible, especially if you're starting in the eastern corners of the map. The biggest thing with this space, though, is making sure the Cats or especially the Lizards can't sit on it and get a Favor card off that spot alone.

## **The Cards**

Finally we have the cards, of which there are 54.

<b><u>Card Type</u></b>	<b><u>Fox</u></b>	<b><u>Mouse</u></b>	<b><u>Rabbit</u></b>	<b><u>Bird</u></b>
<b>Crafting</b>	12	11	11	11
<b>Ambush</b>	1	1	1	2
<b>Dominance</b>	1	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	14	13	13	14

*Table 3: Number of each card type per suit*

So pretty even, foxes have one more crafting card and there are two bird ambushes instead of one but otherwise equal in terms of raw numbers. However, if we break down the cards themselves we get a different picture. For that, I'm just going to insert the crafting chart I uploaded back in November last year.

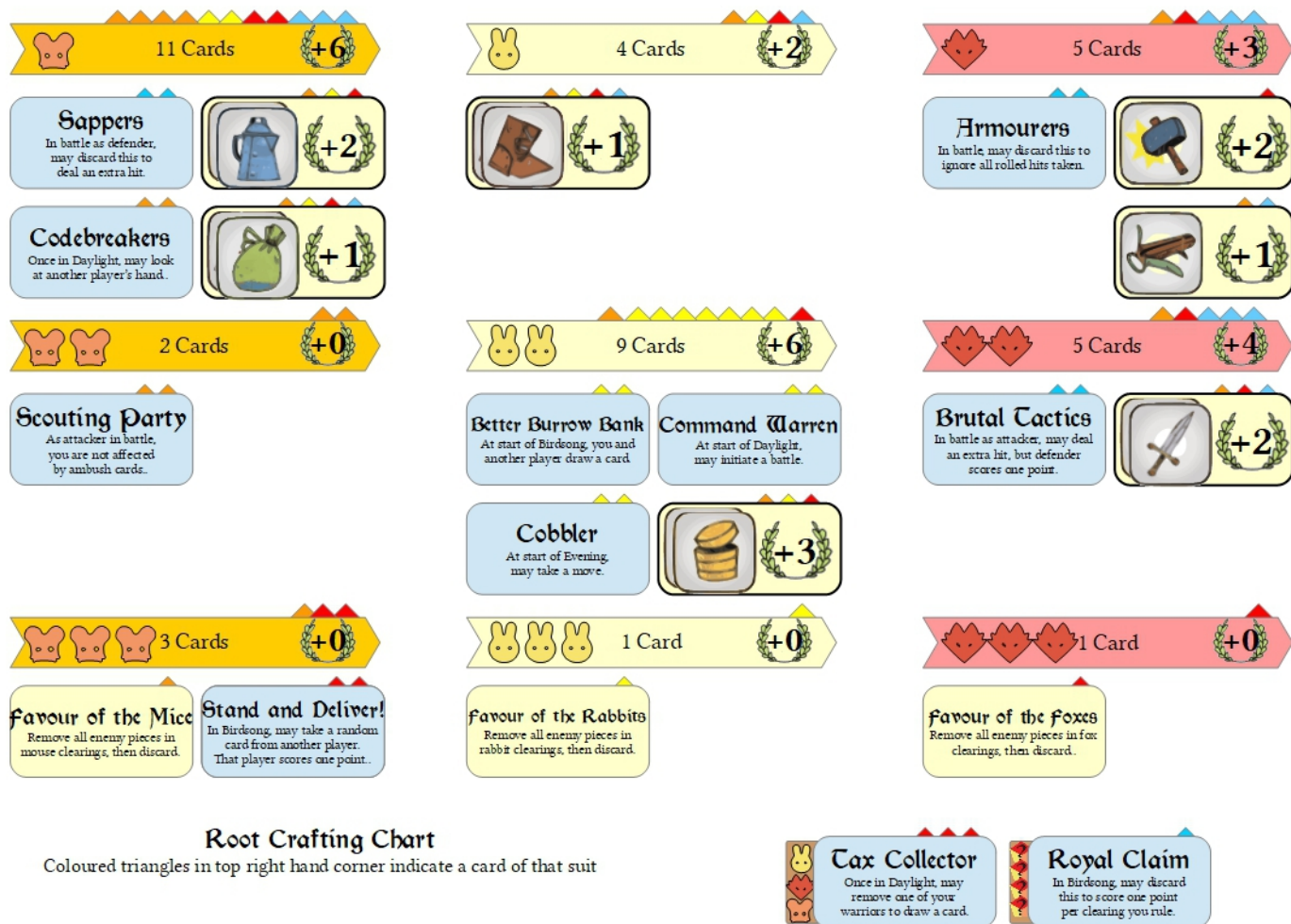


Figure 1: Breakdown of every craftable card in Root, sorted by suit requirements.

Right off the bat, we can see that over 20% of the cards you can possibly draw can be crafted with just one mouse crafter. Further, this one crafter can net you over a quarter of the total victory points available via crafting. Next up is rabbit crafting, which individually contains the most crafting victory points available as well as some of the best upgrades in the game (especially if you're in need of actions, take heed Cats!), with the restriction that they are locked behind two crafters instead of one. Not a huge setback but notable more in the sense that it will take you longer to craft these than those nice one mouse crafting cards. Finally, the fox tree does have some decent crafting potential at both 1 and 2 crafters, but with two big caveats – they are mostly bird cards and these are the strongest items for the Vagabond. There is a lot more one can unpack here in terms of general strategy and through every race guide I will come back to this, but for now just note that if you can only have a few crafters, one on mouse and a couple on rabbit can take you a long way. With 4 crafters you can add a fox crafter to have almost all of the key options available to you sans Scouting Party and Brutal Tactics.

Of everything discussed in this guide, I honestly feel like the cards are the most important thing to consider. They are, however, so important and so faction specific that if I was to discuss them more here I'd end up doubling up a lot in the later guides. So I'm going to leave things here for now, but do know I will be covering crafting paths heavily later, especially for the Cats who rely on cards for any hope at victory.

## **Root Guide: Chapter 2 –** **The Marquise de Cat.**

The Marquise de Cat are thematically the recent conquerors of the forest. They start with the most pieces on the board - more than most factions get in total - as well as having practically the largest army in the game and also the most simple set of rules. Many recommend them to newer players for these reasons as they appear to be the 'new player option' lots of games have, similar to Sol from Twilight Imperium or the easy difficulty spirits in Spirit Island. If you've played more than a handful of games of Root, though, you'll probably have come to the conclusion that the Marquise is anything but easy; I've even talked to a number of players that have never seen a Cat victory.

I myself am a Cats player, after I found myself taking them initially to fill in that slot since no one else wanted to play them but later I was picking them first for one main reason – the ebb and flow of Root has the Marquise de Cat at its heart. If you are playing the Cats the rest of the game is going to be determined by your actions more than any other faction, and if you want to win you have to keep this in mind. You can't just focus on scoring your way to victory through playing your engine well, other factions score far faster than you and you'll never beat them in that race. However, if Root was a series of 1v1s the Cats would (almost – the Eyrie can give you a run for your money) never lose, because almost no other faction is as powerful as you and the ones that are do not have your flexibility.

The catch is that both trying to score and trying to keep everyone down is simply too much for the Cats. Your huge limitation is that you only have three actions a turn, and most of this guide will be geared towards encouraging you to keep your actions as efficient as possible and to find ways to get as many as you can. To this end, I'm going to just flat out recommend that most of the time dominance victories are the way you want to go. Before I wrote this guide I had a chat with Cole and found out that a full two-thirds of the victories he has achieved on Cats have been through dominance cards, with the other third being heavily based upon crafting. The reason for such is simple – with a dominance victory you don't need to waste your precious actions on building purely for score, and spend all your time securing military control of the forest. Crafting has a similar merit in that it's not an action to craft, and takes very few actions to secure the workshops you need. I'll be discussing both of these options through the guide but for now treat the crafting victory discussion as a bit more speculative as I'm not experienced with that type of play, it was only recently brought to my attention – I just feel like I should be covering it anyway.

### **Picking your Starting Location**

Now before we go into each of the corners I just want to lay down a few criteria for what we consider a good starting location.

1. Crafting Opportunities: For reasons I will go into later, I really like rabbit crafting on the Cats. We really want to be able to hold two building slots on rabbit clearings for workshops.
2. Accessibility: While your “March” action gives you two moves instead of one, it's still important to make it count. You want to be able to, in one action, move warriors to defend key locations.
3. Defensibility: Hard to define well, but we want to hold onto our keep at all costs, from both direct attack and more sneaky means. Field Hospitals is a strong ability and we want to keep that for as long as we can.

So with that in mind let's look at our options.

## **North-East Corner.**

In many ways this is the default corner that I've seen many newer players gravitate to. The extra building slot I feel is a bit of a red herring – if your keep is the only territory you can hold you've long since lost the game and the spot immediately south of it shares the same number of slots amongst its adjacent territories. I tend to avoid this territory as it's quite hard to get around many of the adjacent clearings and you can find yourself easily isolated from your own warriors. This clearing also seems especially vulnerable to being demolished by Favor of the Mice, as there are many mouse building slots on the board for the Lizards to exploit, and the proximity of the three other mouse clearings means that the Alliance has an easier time of getting three mouse supporter clearings for their own attempt at a Favor card. However you do have excellent access to rabbit crafting and if you can put a lot of recruiters on your home territory and the three-slot mouse clearing slightly to the south you have an excellent concentration of recruiting power.

## **South-East Corner.**

This corner starts you adjacent to that same three slot mouse clearing we just mentioned and puts you in a great position to control three of the mouse clearings on the board, which are both a plus. It's also further away from its opposite corner, giving you more time and freedom to set up a nice defensive section. The huge downside to this corner is that by far it is the worst for Rabbit crafting. You start with one rabbit crafting slot for sure, but you need two for it to be worthwhile. Further, it is the only corner to not have a single clearing of the same suit within two moves, making it harder to take more rabbit building slots. What is perhaps even more concerning is that it is very easy for a player in the opposing corner to take a number of rabbit clearings of their own, making a Favor of the Rabbits quite easy even for the Eyrie.

If you start here I wouldn't focus on your home space very much and instead focus on fortifying the three nearby mouse clearings as soon as possible, filling them up with recruiters. From here, set yourself up to get a mouse dominance victory, or move out for a fox.

## **South-West Corner.**

If this corner started with two rabbit crafting slots then this entire section of the guide could just be condensed to “Pick this corner”. Sadly it doesn't, but it is still a solid pick regardless. Accessibility and defensibility are just amazing here, provided one thing – you never lose the adjacent fox clearing with five paths. Not only does control of this clearing make it easy to reinforce any of the adjacent clearings with warriors from the others, you also get the other fox space just south of it for free.

Starting here does mean that you will need to fight for your strengths though. You need to hold the fox clearing at all costs because if you lose it then you are utterly divided. If you can hold it though, you now are in an excellent position to control three mouse or fox clearings for a dominance win in either of those two suits. It's also the only clearing within two moves of every corner, giving you the possibility to aim for bird dominance. Further, there are two rabbit clearings adjacent to this space, so you can get your rabbit crafting needs satisfied provided you can keep your opponents off them, though admittedly one of these will be adjacent to the opposite corner. This will also reduce the risk of Favor of the Rabbits.

## **North West Corner.**

Much like its north-eastern counterpart, this corner suffers from issues with accessibility, but again has a lot of rabbit building slots nearby. It is also isolated from anyone starting in the south-east corner. If you were to start here I would focus on the five-path fox clearing, similar to the south-west start. Provided you can then hold that clearing, you now have a good shot at getting any of the dominance cards. All in all, I would say this corner is great for flexibility but does require some ambition, and at higher player counts it's very easy to be pushed in from multiple sides that you can't defend very well.

## **The Opening Turns**

If there was one rule I could change in Root, it would be to make a static turn order with Cats going first. The reason being that you are always going to spend the first half of the game in free fall and having just one turn to get yourself established is so very nice as the Marquise. If I do end up early in the turn order (at least before the Alliance) then my first turn is almost invariably building a sawmill, overworking it immediately, then building either my second recruiter or workshop, depending if I started with any cards I want to craft. If you start after the Alliance then you have to decide how much the opening sympathy is a threat to you with the possibility of just settling with a sawmill. Every now and again you will get an Alliance player who is all up in your business with their sympathy, and if you are playing against one of those then I would try to convince them that it's not advantageous for either of you to be exhausting all of each other's resources in a Red Queen's race this early in the game.

For your next few turns you're going to want to try to be getting out one recruiter a turn with the exception of perhaps another workshop, if crafting is important to you. Our main goal is to try to get as many card draws as possible as early as you can, as of course bird cards are huge for Cats and the higher our chance of drawing a key upgrade card the better – and of course fodder for Field Hospitals is always good too. Ultimately we want to get our three-cost recruiters down as soon as possible so we can be on a baseline of three card draws, whether you wish to build a third sawmill or just overwork twice to achieve that however is up to you. With your other actions you want to oppress the other denizens of the forest to try to make sure no one gets powerful enough to overthrow you.

## **The Rest of the Game – Keeping Everyone Else Down**

Once the game is fully under way it's now time for you to try keeping everyone else down while you obtain your own victory. The key here, as mentioned before, is efficiency in action. To that end, most of what you do here is going to greatly depend on your adversaries, so I've divided the rest of this section into discussions based on the factions you may be fighting.

### **The Eyrie Dynasty**

The battle between the Marquise and the Eyrie is the most immediately obvious thing in any game of Root, and they will be the ones churning through your warriors the most. Thankfully, it takes a lot of effort on their behalf to target your back lines, so provided you keep a solid force up front to defend against them they won't be able to cripple you suddenly. The key here is to watch the recruit section of their decree, many Eyrie players will get complacent with recruit when it is in fact the most dangerous part, as if you manage to take out all the roosts in the suit they are recruiting in they must fall into turmoil. It isn't too uncommon for an Eyrie player to only have two or even one roosts in one suit, especially their home clearing, if they ever make this mistake you can slow them down immensely. It can be tempting to focus on total war with the Eyrie, but keep in mind that they are also units on the board that can help you keep the little guys in line, so it's helpful to keep them down but not out. In general I've noticed that many of the minor factions thrive in a power vacuum so the Marquise and Eyrie players should know each other's places and use their superior strength to mitigate the faster scoring factions.

### **The Woodland Alliance**

Quite simply, smother them. Never fight them head on as you'll just lose, statistically you're only going to kill more than one of their warriors a quarter of the time so it's just really not worth your actions to attack an Alliance base head on. However you have over double their warriors, and when you consider that they are going to have half of those as Officers you can easily have five times the number of warriors on the field as them. Make sure Martial Law applies every time they spread sympathy and they will burn through their supporters quicker than they can replenish them, and when they get a base down just move warriors in but do not fight them! If you control their territory then they can never move out of it, effectively forming a blockade. If they are burning actions fighting this blockade then they aren't organising either, vastly reducing their ability to score. The Alliance is fantastic at bogging down people, so use that as a weapon to your advantage, if you make your territory really unappealing to the Alliance player then they just might slow down someone else instead.

## **The Vagabond**

The common advice given by a lot of players asking how to beat the Vagabond is pretty much on point, just beat them up early before they get all their swords. If you're going the crafting route though the Vagabond can be a great ally, but you're going to want to focus on crafting only Rabbit and Mouse items so you're not giving them the tools that will make them truly powerful, and they are giving you a steady stream of cards to get more points from! Just make sure not to overfeed them. If you're going dominance, consider letting yourself be last in points then offer to coalition with them before you activate the dominance card, as this will negate a huge threat to you. Failing that, keep in mind that once you're hostile to the Vagabond that moving through your territory (except for when they are using Slip of course) is like moving through molasses for them, so take opportunities to throw warriors in their way to keep them out of important territories. Also remember that you always will become hostile to them if they kill one of your warriors, even if they are on defence.

## **The Lizard Cult**

Before the changes, this would have just been one sentence telling you to knock out a few lightly defended gardens and then you're golden. After the changes the Lizards are a powerhouse who may not necessarily win the game but are great at stopping you, the Eyrie and the Alliance, so try to be friends with those players and team up on the Lizards. Feel free to liberally discard cards with Field Hospitals to manipulate the outcast suit. Your best bet here is to keep them stuck on one suit's clearings and to make sure they never get the dominance card for that suit. It is especially important to take note of the outcast suit before you play any dominance cards and remember that you are allowed to look through his Lost Souls pile at any time. Nice Lizards players will keep their Lost Souls sorted in front of them to make this easier for people, but they are under no obligation to do so. All in all I find that these guys are my greatest enemy in the games I oppose them, more so than the Eyrie, as they desire to attack soft targets far more indiscriminately than any other faction while ignoring your nicely organised defences. Also they get out more Favor cards than every other faction combined.

## **The Riverfolk Company**

Peaceful traders in appearance but actually more akin to a shady corporation straight out of Shadowrun. If played well the Riverfolk will leave themselves with no weakness on the board and have an amazing ability to blackmail, bribe or kneecap you, and form a constant threat to your keep and lightly defended clearings. They are essentially your opposite, they struggle to put warriors on the board but have actions galore. I've seen Riverfolk with a dozen actions in one turn assemble all their warriors and just take out the Cats' entire back line at once. To beat these guys you have to control the conversation at the table – don't let anyone believe their lies, between all of you there should be no more than two warriors a turn spent buying from him. Finally, kill their warriors whenever you see more than one or two in one clearing, putting warriors on the board is the only thing for them that is expensive.

## **Winning the Game**

While you've been keeping everyone else nicely under control never forget to keep an eye on your win condition, whether that be dominance or score, be sure to be constantly working towards it. While it can be tempting to play dominance as early as you can get it, try to anticipate how your opponents will react to it. Even if you've hit full strength pretty early, it doesn't take much from three coordinated opponents to break through one clearing. Spend some time clearing up your opponents without focusing on score so you're taking the inevitable battles on your own terms. You'll find it easier to win against depleted opponents, especially because if you've not activated dominance yet they aren't focused totally on war - while you are. It's also just kinda relieving to finally be able to use your military just to beat people up without worrying about score.

It can be useful to place your recruiters on the clearings you plan to win dominance on, as you can replenish troops if you fail to grab the victory in one turn after you play the dominance card, but don't necessarily focus on this; your opponents will tend to ignore your other clearings trying to stop you getting dominance while simultaneously scorching your dominance clearings. Don't panic if the other players do successfully stop you from winning dominance immediately. This is actually not an uncommon scenario, I've seen several dominance



wins where everyone throws themselves at one clearing and manages to clear it out, but then the Cats come back and clear them from that clearing and suddenly they don't have the manpower to stop you any more. With five recruiters down and Field Hospitals, you can easily soak eight to ten losses in a round then retake that position, something the other players will struggle with.

As for a score-based victory, just make sure you're crafting well and don't let too much wood build up. A wood stockpile can be good to burst a few points in the final turn, but is a very very tasty target, especially for a despotic Eyrie. As with dominance wins keeping other people down is important but this strategy tends to be one you go for when you've got more breathing room in your 'beating up' duties.

### **Crafting (Where I finally describe why I keep mentioning Rabbit crafting)**

So in chapter one I included a chart of all the crafting options in the game, and from that alone you can see that the rabbit suit has the most possible victory points available in crafting. Beyond that though it also contains three fantastic abilities that all help cover your biggest weakness as Cats: the often mentioned lack of actions. Command Warren lets you start a battle at the beginning of daylight, allowing you to push back an invading force or more frequently just remove a Sympathy Token without burning an action. Cobbler gives you a free movement to rearrange your forces, useful for pulling them back after a strike, preparing a defence or ensuring you have enough forces to keep Martial Law applied. Better Burrow Bank just gives you more cards, and as Cats card draws are both more actions and more troops on top of more crafting opportunities.

Don't overlook the other suits however, Codebreakers is a fantastic one-cost card that allows you to scout out Favor cards and Ambush cards, just don't forget to use it! If you can't get down much Rabbit crafting then Scouting Party can be nice if you pick it up as it allows you to safely remove Sympathy or other undefended tokens and buildings with only one soldier, but otherwise two mouse workshops are only useful for getting one cost mouse cards faster. Tax Collectors is another good pick up, because what is one warrior to you against a card? Sadly, Tax Collectors is the only reason I would get a workshop on fox early because most of the Fox crafting options are found only on bird cards, or are just flat out too good on the Vagabond for you to let them have, which is a risk you have to calculate. The one exception to my 'no fox crafting' rule however is Armorers, but only when you're in the final stages of gearing up for a dominance victory. Negating a good roll can be the difference between victory or defeat when a big army comes rolling in. I know I just recommended the majority of the cards in game, but they are all hugely useful in their situation and as the Cats you take what you can get.

My recommendation for your first few workshops is either two rabbit then a mouse, or a mouse then two rabbit. One rabbit workshop is not hugely useful, so if you can't get a second down quickly just focus on recruitment instead. If you ever feel comfortable getting a fourth workshop, one mouse, two rabbit and one fox gets you pretty much every crafting option you'll want in a game, including Royal Claim.

### **Closing Remarks**

Well, that was all a fair amount of text but I hope you find it useful. I plan to refine it over time, as ultimately this is all just an expression of my current opinion and I will likely refine that opinion with the experience I will gain from future games. I expect that many people will find much to disagree with in this guide and I look forward to receiving criticism, I expect I have much to learn. Still, what I feel are the main points of this guide are as follows – always be keeping the other players in check, watch out for opportunities to win through dominance and treat every bird card like a special gift from a beloved friend.

Up next will be my Eyrie Dynasties guide, and from here on out the guides will be much shorter, but the Eyrie will be on the longer side of that.

## **Root Guide: Chapter 3 –** **The Eyrie Dynasties.**

You know, at the time of writing this guide, I gotta say it's been a while since I played the good old Birds. A shame because I feel they are, to play, the coolest faction in Root. Cats are my favourite because they give you the most strategic options, but the Birds are just so interesting mechanically.

Needless to say, with the Eyrie, the Decree should have about as much attention put into it as the board. It's amazingly powerful in theory, but in practice very easy to mess yourself up on. If you can master it however you combine the flexibility and power of the Cats with the action economy of the Otters. To that end I'm going to launch straight into a few tips on just maintaining your decree.

1. Recruit seems safe until it isn't. It might be tempting to throw your spare cards into recruit, but this actually comes with two pretty big risks. First, you might just flat out run out of warriors to put on the board. Second, it's actually pretty easy for other players to turmoil Birds on recruit. Unless you're keeping a bunch of warriors on your recruiting roosts then they are prime targets for being picked off, and you can't do anything on your turn to prevent a turmoil on recruit if it's due to happen. Saying that, you do really need warriors so just ensure you always have backup roosts on recruit; never put a recruit card into a suit where you have only one.
2. Move is pretty safe. It's a bit of an obvious statement but I feel it's worth sharing my observation that I have never, ever, seen an Eyrie player turmoil on move.
3. Have some ambition though. The more actions you're maintaining the better, and it'd be hard to go wrong with extra actions in either move or battle. Always try to put two cards into your Decree each turn, even if you're just dumping them into move.
4. Don't go too heavy on the bird cards. If you're doing a lot of actions on non-bird cards you can save them for when it counts and it means turmoil is less costly to you.
5. Turmoil is okay, as long as you plan for it. Falling into turmoil on build and not having many bird cards in your decree is not a huge loss, and having out all your roosts on the board will quickly get your points back.

### **Picking Your Leader and the First Few Turns**

#### **Charismatic**

For me, Charismatic is the ideal first leader choice, but only if I get the right cards. With Charismatic, your aim is to get everything down as quickly as possible without playing more than one bird card, then turmoil early before moving onto one of the other leaders.

If you remember from the first chapter of this guide, you always have two adjacent clearings that share a suit with a third clearing of that type two moves away. Therefore, if you start with one card in the same suit as your home territory (to go into move) and a card of the same suit as two of your adjacent clearings (to go into build), you can put both of them down (or a bird into build if you want to be safer) and you won't turmoil until the end of your fourth turn. Provided of course that you can secure all these territories.

In these four turns you want to try and get one or even two more cards of other suits into build to try to get out as many of your roosts as quickly as possible, while putting the rest into recruit and move to get your warriors out there, taking then holding positions. It'll be a chaotic first few turns but if you pull it off right you can have all or almost all of your roosts and warriors on the board ready for round five. Make sure not to turmoil on recruit by running out of warriors before this happens - even if you put only one more card into recruit there is a risk of this happening.

Past the first few rounds though Charismatic can fall off in effectiveness as it becomes easy to turmoil from having too many warriors, and its bonus can be effectively replicated by just putting more cards into recruit once you have safe territory for them.

## **Builder**

If the cards don't work out for Charismatic (for example you've gotten several bird cards but nothing of your home roost's suit or the two adjacent same-suit roosts) then Builder can actually be a pretty safe bet for your first few turns. A bird in recruit and in move are both pretty safe picks so all you need to do is get a decent card into build and you can both expand early, get your warriors out and also get some crafting victory points while you are at it (just be careful to not give too much to the Vagabond!). If you're playing Builder early a bird card into build is preferable, but a non-bird card can work too. You probably will want to slow down your start though to give you more time to recruit, and use crafting to make up the extra victory points.

Builder is not that great in the late game unless you've just gone into turmoil with a few high victory point crafting cards in hand that haven't been built yet, but this is a niche scenario.

## **Commander**

This can be used first if you want to heavily dent a stubborn faction early but is typically used as the classic follow-up to Charismatic. To use just simply beat people up and keep your territory defended. If you can get your roosts all down before this card then hold on to them, you've won the game, so you can just go out there and beat people up to make sure they don't win first.

## **Despot**

Despite its use in the walk through game, I would only start with the Despot if I was planning a no-turmoil game. No-turmoil games starting as Despot are quite a good strategy, but only if you're fighting opponents that have many tokens and buildings down on the board. Woodland Alliance is a good example here, as it's easy to pick off two sympathy a turn for an additional four points on top of your roost scoring. Now you might think that a no-turmoil game on a leader that starts with a bird in build sounds counter-intuitive, but as Despot you're likely to be losing roosts as you won't be able to defend them well as a Charismatic start. Still though, don't put too many bird cards into your decree, think about where you really need them.

Starting as Despot for the bird in build before swapping to another leader is not worthwhile, you either don't get enough warriors out early or don't make enough use of your leader's ability for it to be justified, and it's better to swap to Despot later in the game when there is more stuff on the board. Despot is also a very good choice to swap to after Charismatic if you didn't get all your roosts down.

## **Crafting**

As the Eyrie, all item crafting is just dependant on what cards you draw and if you're playing Builder. Nabbing a few one victory point items isn't too bad, but will be most of what you do when crafting for points as the Eyrie.

Be careful to not equate "I can't do crafting for victory points" with upgrade crafting though, which is an error. Upgrades are pretty nice, however which ones you play are mostly going to be dependant on what cards you draw and what territories you happen to start around, so just make the ones that you can. I will point out that Brutal Tactics combined with Commander is amazing for beating up the Alliance (two free hits!), and you can decide to use it after the rolls have been made! Another notable synergy with your faction is Tax Collectors which can be used to trim down excess pieces to delay a turmoil on recruit (though only once a turn), and more cards are nice too. Since you don't need bird cards that much, Armorers and Sappers are also solid crafts despite being wasteful on the Cats and will help you defend your roosts, and prevent you from relying too much on recruiting new warriors. Really, anything goes though.

## **The Rest of the Game**

So naturally this depends on your strategy, but in broad strokes you're going to be defending your territory while keeping your opponents down. If you've pulled off your opening few rounds successfully you've hopefully gotten most of your roosts and warriors out, and are now probably playing either Commander or Despot.

If you're playing Commander, now is your time to just move around and fight everyone ensuring that no one is strong enough to deny you victory. Remember that you have a bit of a weird natural ally in the Cats for the mid-game, and working together to quash the pesky minor factions is beneficial for you both, until they realise that you're scoring like mad from roosts and they start trying to take them out. When to place another card into build is a tricky decision. If you didn't get as many of your roosts down as you'd have liked in the first phase then early is better, I like to be scoring at least 4 VP a turn so if I drop below that then I put a card into build, usually bird at this stage. If people are attacking you heavily though the sooner the better. You may very well find yourself in turmoil before the end of the game, but just remember these two rules: don't abuse bird cards and turmoil on your own terms and you'll be fine.

If you're playing Despot at this stage then turmoil is about as inevitable as the other players let it be. You can leave a roost undefended to tempt players into destroying it, but if this doesn't work just remember that players intentionally letting you get all your roosts out is for the best for you in the long run.

With either strategy you've got a fairly good shot at making it to the finish line without a turmoil, and if you don't, just play either Despot if you went Commander or visa versa. Any special tricks that Cats may use to keep the other factions down apply for you as well, and if it comes time to face the Cats themselves just use your superior attacking power (especially if you're running Brutal Tactics and Commander!) to beat them down and take out their recruiters or even their keep. The only exception to those tips is that with Commander you actually have quite a good shot at destroying Woodland Alliance bases – but only if they have 2 or so warriors. If they have more then 2 or 3 warriors on a base to defend it you've already beaten them. I'll also add one thing I forgot to mention in the Cats guide – if you're attacking Lizards make sure you can kill the Gardens too. Attacking just the warriors does nothing for you and helps them.

As Despot, place warriors down around Alliance bases and eat the sympathy tokens as they appear, as for you they are tasty victory point flavoured biscuits. Just don't get too greedy and move-attack those tokens too often, even an Alliance getting all their sympathy tokens eaten can burst a huge amount of points if they are being given lots of cards. Also keep an eye out for that dangerous Otter hit squad, they are really good at hitting undefended Roosts. The Vagabond can do the same.

## **Closing Remarks**

While I had not as much to say here as I did for the Cats, there is a lot of overlap. Anyone who is interested in playing as the Eyrie but not the Cats I would highly recommend going back to that guide and just reading through the “Keeping Everyone Else Down” section – as I mentioned, a lot of that applies to you as well. Beyond that, just maintain a strong and flexible decree and always plan for the possibility of turmoil and you'll find the Eyrie Dynasties to be a very powerful faction capable of bulldozing through huge armies and defensive positions with ease. You are after all the only faction capable of getting five hits in one combat.

Next up is the Woodland Alliance, my first guide for a faction which can't rely on brute military strength to secure victory. I am looking forward to discussing everyone's favourite ~~terrorists~~ freedom fighters.

## **Root Guide: Chapter 4 – The Woodland Alliance.**

The Woodland Alliance is interesting, as I've seen people both label it as very overpowered and also quite underpowered. In general, the consensus is that the higher the average experience in the group, the lower the chance of success for the Alliance - something which I would agree with. Ultimately, the Alliance's way of scoring points is quite intuitive and just efficiently playing all the cards you have is probably the most effective way of scoring so if no one is trying to stop you then you'll win easily.

The thing is, this style of play is pretty vulnerable and as soon as people recognise how easily it wins, they'll put a stop to it. So while I will be discussing a few tips on just scoring points effectively, I'm also going to talk about how to best oppose any adversity you might face.

For this guide, and very likely future guides, I'm going to start with crafting, as it's really a game-wide goal and discussing it can emphasise some of the things we want to focus on, so here we go.

### **Crafting**

As the Woodland Alliance, crafting is thankfully a pretty easy thing for us to do with very little requirement to focus on specific crafting suits. I do however have a few suggestions for cards worth putting effort into. Armorers on Alliance just takes the best ability in the game, Guerrilla War, and pushes it into overdrive. If any other faction had the combination of Guerrilla War and Armorers they would never lose a game. The Alliance gets to convert cards to points far easier than any other faction in the game, so put simply the more cards the better – therefore aim for Better Burrow Bank and Tax Collectors. It might seem counter-intuitive to craft Tax Collectors on a low-warrior faction, but you can just recruit that warrior back in evening with very little loss to yourself. Speaking of your low warrior count, while I will say in advance you don't want to be doing the attack actions, they may become necessary, which will make Ambushes suck for you. Therefore Scouting Party or just Codebreakers can help you avoid those.

Crafting for Victory Points is always easy for you but by now I think I've stressed “don't feed the Vagabond” enough in other guides so just focus on mouse and rabbit VP cards here (as fox cards contain the best items for the Vagabond).

The last point I want to make with Crafting is to always keep in mind you get the opportunity to place down sympathy before you craft, meaning if you can plan it well you can fulfil all the requirements of a card before anyone has the opportunity to stop you. You can easily spend several turns planning to set things up for a favor card.

### **Your First (As Few As Possible) Turns**

Your first goal as the Alliance should always be getting a base down. To that end we want to consider two things – where can I place sympathy that will likely survive a round and how can I give myself the most options for revolt? So you're going to start with six cards, three in hand and three in supporters. Before your turn comes around, look at all these and work out how you can leave yourself with the best possible chance of a second turn revolt. There are a lot of possibilities here but ultimately just think through them and see if you can give yourself at least two opportunities for revolt. It's worth nothing there are very few cards that are worth not revolting on the second turn for, except for maybe a favor card, an ambush or one of those key crafting cards I mentioned, so try not to get tempted.

Once you've worked out the best suits for revolt, it's time to pick the potential locations. For your first base you want it to be nice and safe, while avoiding being too isolated - the two clearings with only two paths could lead you to getting easily bottlenecked in. Look at what the Cats and Birds have and avoid anything you think they'd just clear you off of. Clearings with buildings or several warriors on them or which are close to their starting positions or key strategic positions are all things to avoid. The Vagabond and Riverfolk may also consider your sympathy free points, so keep that in mind too. From there, try and aim for as central a position as you can get.

Once that sympathy is down, put any cards you don't have particular goals for into your supporters and hope you picked your clearings right.

### **Once Your First Base Is Down**

If that's all gone well, now you're an actual military on the board and not just a vague idea and collection of sympathisers. You're going to want to get a few more officers down as soon as possible, preferably five or so. You can get these from either other revolts or the train action, but remember that it becomes really hard to defend many clearings as the Alliance if you're keeping a lot of warriors in Officers. To that end, I recommend saving your next revolts for clearings where it will hurt.

Now, for this further revolt I want to introduce you to the concept of escorting the payload. While we have to place our first token down somewhere safe and pray everyone is too busy getting their engine going to notice, now it's down we have no such limits. The ability to always take the higher roll, I just want to say right now, is the strongest ability in the game, and if you don't believe me look at the maths behind it.

Seven of the possible sixteen combinations will result in you losing no warriors – a **fourty-four** percent chance  
Five of the remaining combinations lose you only one warrior  
Leaving you a three in sixteen chance of losing two warriors and  
a mere one in sixteen chance, a mere **six percent**, of losing three.

This means that if you were to send one warrior to defend a sympathy token other players only have a one in four chance of destroying it in a single action, and with two warriors, a one in sixteen chance. This is why Armorers is so incredible on the Woodland Alliance, it makes you damn near invincible. With this in mind, we can now be aggressive with our sympathy. With four officers we can move some warriors two spaces, organise one of them and then recruit that one guy back at base to keep it safe, and we've now placed a time bomb in an important clearing that the enemy will struggle immensely to remove. They can move as many warriors as they want there and chances are, they are just going to die in the fires of glorious revolution. Throw in a combination of ambush, Armorers and Sappers, and you have just made yourself less of a thorn in their side and more of a dagger to their throat.

The Alliance is so incredibly strong at defence you can safely do this while leaving only two warriors behind at your base, most players will not bother uprooting a base unless it's only got one warrior on it, especially if you have Armorers lying around.

Other than planning revolts, always be looking at your supporter cards and working out how they can translate to sympathy worth the most points. Naturally, spending all your cards on Martial Law is a huge waste of potential, so avoid doing so unless necessary – if you have only one or two well-defended bases it's typically pretty safe to bank a few cards. Think through how to make your card spending efficient: ask yourself questions such as “What combination of bird and non-bird cards will allow me to most efficiently score with the clearings I am next to?” and “What is each player's plan for the next few turns and how can I use that to my advantage?”. For example, is there a clearing the Eyrie will have to move through to avoid turmoil or a tempting target for the Cats that you can put a token on to get a free card? Keep in mind that each card you spend on sympathy translates to a touch shy of a victory point, so if someone moves and battles to destroy a sympathy token then it's just paid itself off twice over.

### **Winning the Game**

While you are doing all this, my biggest suggestion is not to get too far ahead in score and hold safely in reserve whatever you can. To me, the ideal Alliance game ends when you go from about fifteen points to thirty in one turn. With only one or two bases down, you can safely hold many cards in your supporters while defending those bases quite strongly. Don't hold so many that everyone starts to sweat, but having a few of your lower-scoring sympathy tokens down and just keeping the rest of your cards for one big scoring turn will result in less people focusing on you. Even against experienced players, you can be deceptive about your point-scoring potential. Fifteen points in one turn might seem like a lofty goal, but when you consider that you can place a couple of sympathy in birdsong, craft off that sympathy in daylight then move out all your defenders in evening and organise them into sympathy it's quite achievable

The key to this is to be planning and to constantly take note of your current scoring potential. Balance getting out easy points where you can and banking what is safe to do so. As I mentioned previously, throwing down sympathy in the most optimal way, for both points and cards, is key here. We want to be just behind the pack in score while building up a reserve of points so that we don't appear threatening, and more importantly are too difficult to deal with. Your opposition should see your bases, the warriors on them and the Armorers card you've crafted and decide you're not worth the immense amount of effort it would take to dislodge you, then suddenly you just 'win'.

On that last point, it's very easy to get other players to convince themselves that you're "someone else's problem". Why should the Cats waste all their actions and cards moving in to destroy just one base and sympathy token? They might not even roll well enough to do so anyway! And yeah, you've got a few cards in your sympathy, but it's only four or five and you've only just got your second base out and you're behind in points! Not to mention you're by far not the biggest threat to them on the board...

### **Countering Specific Opponents**

On top of general strategy, there are a few points I want to make about the Alliance in match-ups with the other factions.

#### **The Marquise de Cat**

Our main opposition by virtue of the fact they simply have the most clearings and stuff in said clearings; the thing to watch out for here is them doing exactly what I have suggested in my Cats guide and choking you out with pieces. It's pretty easy for them to commit five warriors to blockading your base. Try not to be the biggest threat to them, so even if they do blockade you, it's hopefully only one combat action to re-secure the clearing. Another good reason to hold bases in reserve is that if you revolt in a clearing adjacent to your base you now have a viable path of exit for spreading sympathy through organisation. You'll ultimately never win a direct war with the Marquise, but you can hope to slip under their radar. Also look for large stockpiles of wood, these can be incredible troves of points for you with a nicely placed revolt.

#### **The Eyrie Dynasties**

The Eyrie can be your biggest threat or your largest provider of income. The static nature of their Decree leaves opportunity for exploitation – look for where they need to place bases, battle or move through and place your sympathy there. The Eyrie can be quite easily forced to provide you with several cards a turn with just some careful planning and observation. Further, buzzing around the feet of the Eyrie also puts you further out of reach of the Cats. On the flip side, Commander is a scary card for you. That free hit goes a long way to negating Guerrilla War, and if they have Brutal Tactics as well then you can consider your key ability nullified. I would focus on getting underfoot with the Eyrie more in the early game, then migrate away from them as they grow in strength. This works well for you as you don't want to be targeting them for revolt anyway, as it's not like you'll get more than one victory point from them.

A Despot playing Eyrie can also have a strong game by eating your sympathy, this can feed you a lot of cards but it gives them points too. With care, their greed can be abused, but the inverse applies as well.

#### **The Vagabond**

The Vagabond has several tools up their sleeve that can hurt you and you have nothing that can hurt them. A crossbow bolt can really even the odds of a fight with you, and definitely watch out for the Scoundrel's Scorched Earth (though thankfully that's only once a game). They can also attack a lot in one turn, meaning a higher chance of getting the rolls they need. Your best bet here is to leave the bigger factions to deal with the Vagabond and making sure you don't interfere with them doing so. As always, don't get tempted by crafting toys for them either. Like an Eyrie with Despot, the Vagabond can go hostile with you and get two points off of your sympathy. To this end, I suggest crafting some of the weaker items for them and trying to befriend them a bit, so they see you as a good source of victory points from aid.

## The Riverfolk

The Riverfolk and the Alliance are the two factions with the least amount of interaction in the game. You should never buy anything from the Riverfolk, as it's too easy for them to just keep your warriors on their board and deny you a huge portion of your army. They also have little incentive to spend your warriors – it's not like you'll control much territory they'll want to put a trading post on. Further, they make terrible targets for revolt. Maybe they have a trading post where another faction has a few buildings down which is a nice sweetener but that's about it.

They also can do very little to you. Sure they get lots of actions, but recruiting is expensive and you need a large force to dislodge or force Martial Law onto the Alliance. Ultimately, you're both relying on the stronger factions to deal with one another, so just make sure there is someone in place to beat up the Riverfolk if they ever get ambitious. The most you can do to stop them is just making sure your opponents don't get too greedy and spend too much on them.

## The Lizard Cult

Now here is a fun one to discuss. I personally think that the Lizards versus the Alliance is one of the most interesting match ups in the game as both of you have huge potential to completely screw the other. I've heard lots of people say the Lizards just shut down the Alliance but let me tell you the ball is in your court for this one.

Against the Lizards, your entire strategy is to never let them sanctify you ever. To this end, you're going to sit on one base for as much of the game as possible, and do your utmost to stop the outcast suit from matching it. Thankfully, provided you're getting more than a trickle of cards from Outrage you have more cards going through your hand than anyone else in the game, giving you great power to manipulate the outcast suit. Your job here is to focus on spreading sympathy to clearings of a different suit to your base and to use bird cards when you want to spread sympathy to those of the same suit. From there, make sure you're using bird cards to train with where possible, and you can use crafting more liberally here to both deny the Lizards (a strong crafting race themselves) the items and further manipulate the outcast suit. Just be careful to not overfeed the Vagabond, but if you're crafting more than the aid they will give you enhances your power over the outcast suit.

Provided you can pull this off then oh boy can you give the Lizards a headache. There are two reasons that you really hurt them. First, everything you kill in a revolt does **not** become an acolyte. You can wipe out half a dozen Lizards and the gardens underneath them and they get nothing for it at all. Secondly, they *really* struggle to dislodge your sympathy. They have to spend at least one acolyte, probably two if you're manipulating the outcast suit well, to start combat with your sympathy – a combat they will likely end up losing warriors on, warriors that will now not become acolytes. Sure, they might be able to convert your warriors then attack a now undefended sympathy token, but that is a lot of acolytes they've just spent to destroy a sympathy you placed at little effort yourself. They are going to run out of acolytes before you're going to run out of sympathy. The best thing is when you force them to move warriors from adjacent clearings to stop your revolt, meaning you've cost them several cards to do something that you do effortlessly.

Of course the other players might be able to conspire to work the outcast suit against you, but no one burns through cards like you do, and it's a lot of work to remove the base of an Alliance player who sure is doing a good job of getting in the Lizards' way... Not to mention, do they even have enough acolytes now after they've been forced to spend them all to stop your potential revolts?

Sure, the risk of losing your own base exists, but you have the initiative here, not them.

## Closing Remarks

Well that was a lengthier guide than I intended, and I want to say that I trimmed about a quarter of it off in editing. Keeping that in mind I'll keep the closing remarks brief – stay under the radar, always be 'someone else's problem' and bank up points potential for a big point scoring turn at the end of the game. Cards that give you card draws are better for you than the other factions, and Armorers makes you a god.



## **Root Guide: Chapter 5 –** **The Vagabond**

When I was hyping Root to my friends the Vagabond was kind of the big finale of my spiel. “Oh, it's a highly asymmetric war game... and the last faction isn't actually a faction, just one dude playing an RPG”. The presence of the Vagabond is part of the reason I bought Root in the first place. They are so interesting in concept but their uniqueness does come with a caveat – it can be hard to know how 'strong' they are. This is a big reason they tend to do well with inexperienced players, no one is looking at player boards to see what is going on there, and with the Vagabond your player board is everything you have minus your piece.

It's hardly a shocking revelation then that my first piece of advice for Vagabond players is “get stuff”. Throughout the entire game, whenever you get a card in your hand, you want to see if you can craft it. Your first four turns should just be systematically visiting the ruins one by one because you *really* want that hammer and sword. Once you have lots of stuff then it's really just a matter of how to efficiently use it.

Now if left alone to do so, you can pretty much just do things and win. If a few people craft items along the way, even better. The thing is that the Vagabond starts out quite vulnerable, and once people start realising how much they can run away with things people won't just leave you alone. Ultimately how much people attack you here is a bit out of your control, but I'm going to write this from the assumption that people are going to attack you a reasonable amount, and discuss ways we can avoid that happening.

### **The Vagabonds**

#### **The Thief**

Both the canonical Vagabond and the only one I am aware of a name for (Roger), the Thief is, I would argue, the most balanced selection. You start with a sword, which is always good, and the tea means you never have to worry about saving up items. Steal as an action is okay, but the randomness of it can be an issue. I'd pair it with Codebreakers so you have an idea what you might get, and see if anyone is holding the second hammer in their hand to try and keep it from you.

#### **The Tinker**

I feel the Tinker is the most spoiled Vagabond. Starting with a hammer and the ability to search through the discard pile to get anything you want are both huge boons to the class. This means that the Tinker, alone amongst the Vagabonds, is capable of crafting a Favor card, and it's very hard to deny the Tinker what it needs to do so. Even if someone keeps the hammer in their hand (there is only one in the deck after all), having easy access to two more means you can quite quickly build up items, and you even have an extra bag to hold them all. The catch here is that by having such a high potential but also starting with no swords, skilled players should be attacking you a lot. This kinda means that you either get away with this risky pick and win the game easily or you don't, so I suggest only playing the Tinker if you're new to the Vagabond and you think your friends won't give you a hard time about it.

#### **The Ranger**

Between your sword and your crossbow you start the game in a fantastic place to defend yourself, and it doesn't take many items to become a very strong combat character. Your torch ability to repair three items is both simple and effective, and greatly reduces your need to lick your wounds in the forest. If you're playing the Ranger you're going to go combat build, so feel free to identify fairly early a good target to start collecting victory points from. Remember that your crossbow doesn't get you infamy points but can be used to turn yourself hostile to a faction provided you kill a warrior with it.

## **The Vagrant**

I've not played much with the Vagrant so this is going to be mostly speculative. The Vagrant leans the most into points purely from Infamy out of all the vagabonds, as you score infamy points for all warriors that your ability kills, assuming both factions are hostile to you. This is pretty strong, but don't overvalue it. You start with only one other item beyond the default torch and boots, so no swords, which means you're vulnerable to early attacks. Sure, you can get up to six hits from your ability to score from, but you can also get that from the Arbiter's two bonus swords as soon as they find their third sword in the ruins. Instigate does benefit from the fact that you won't take the hits to your own items, however.

## **The Arbiter**

Let's just ignore the ability you start with for a second and focus on the fact you start with two swords. Two swords. The Arbiter essentially doesn't have the phase the other Vagabonds have at the start of the game where you're vulnerable to being attacked and everyone is looking to slow you down. Within the first few turns of the game you'll be rocking three swords into combat, meaning you can start scoring huge infamy points really early, while being really hard to shut down. While the Tinkerer may have the highest strength potential, I would put forward the Arbiter as the consistently strongest Vagabond. Oh, and you can also protect someone too, I guess. I'll leave that up to you to judge if that's worthwhile in your game but I've never seen this ability used.

## **The Scoundrel**

Another vulnerable early game no starting swords Vagabond with probably the coolest ability. Sadly you do not score infamy points off of Scorched Earth. It breaks my heart too. However a complacent Cats could get you a fair amount of points off wood though, or any other space with a lot of buildings and tokens on it. The fact that you will definitely kill everything on one space is not to be underrated, but your aforementioned early game vulnerability combined with your scary ability will make you a prime target. A bit of an odd use of the Scoundrel is that you are a really good companion Vagabond if you plan to coalition with another player. I once won a game as the Cats because the Scoundrel cut off the best way into my territory before I played a dominance card.

## **Crafting**

Whatever you find most tempting at the time, go for. Items are of course amazing for you, as you get both the double whammy of the victory points and the items, prioritise the hammer if you get it and if you do that opens up more swords which are kind of your premier item. Non-item cards can be okay in the right situation but I'll leave that up to you, with the note that it's very hard to go wrong here, it's just hard to get many of them out and they tend to not be as important as the items.

## **Getting Started**

So depending on your character, you're going to be either starting with a sword or not. Now no matter what, your first goal is to loot the ruins, but if you don't have a sword in hand then you're even more vulnerable. What to consider here is that it's becoming more common in the meta to spend a turn or two beating up the Vagabond early before they get too many swords, so if you're playing a character with none at all then it's very easy to force you to spend your second turn licking your wounds. So therefore the key throughout all this is to assess who has the easiest time of hurting you and avoid them. The biggest candidate here is the Riverfolk, if you end your turn on a clearing with several Otters then it's a non-decision for them to spend an action or two fighting you, so just don't do that. Keep an eye on where you think the Eyrie might try and expand to and avoid that space as well. The Cats may potentially attack you but honestly, they are busy enough as it is for the first few rounds of the game so as long as you don't end your turn amongst several of their warriors then you're probably fine.

If you do suspect someone may be going out of their way to attack you in the early game, then there are a couple of things you can do to make it more difficult. Clearings with a sympathy and without many warriors are quite effective persuasion to keep out of your fur for a little while, or just hanging out where there aren't large armies.

## **The Mid Game**

Once you have your ruin sword you're now a bit less vulnerable. If you have two swords now, it will start taking co-ordinated forces to put a dent into you. A large army can attack you, but it's now not as easy nor as attractive a proposition. If you have one sword I would try to beg, borrow and steal to get a second any way you can, you need it as soon as possible.

From this stage any items are still great for you to get, and right up until the last couple of rounds they are always a strong priority, but now you're actually interacting with the game and not just keeping your head low and going from ruin to ruin. Besides that though your focus is on just, well, scoring. Here, the Vagabond has a multitude of options. I prefer to aid early in the game a couple of times, using the swords, boots, bags and tea I don't really need to turn cards I don't care for into free points. Some Vagabonds like to try and establish a crafting relationship with a faction and if you can do so go for it, but I'm assuming an ambivalent to hostile table state, so that's not something you can rely on. Key factions to aid then are the ones that you want off your tail and which get the least out of the cards, so Cats and the Eyrie basically. I'll be discussing your relationships with the factions in more detail later however.

Quests are nice when you can pick them up, but I haven't really found a specific strategy around them. I favour grabbing cards for the first quest in each suit then victory points thereafter, which I feel is 'optimal', but whether I do a quest or not is more determined by whether I am able to than any specific decision making, so no recommendation here.

Once you have three swords, you've now found the most optimal way of scoring points. In theory, you can get nine points off warriors alone (though this is admittedly unlikely) from three attack actions, though about six or so is more likely. Even this is quite good – two points reliably from one use of an item is about as good as it gets, as crafting usually gets you one point per item use and is more limited, and aid only gets you two points if you have achieved maximum friendship and requires you to spend cards as well. Combat is such an excellent way of scoring points late game, and also has the added bonus of keeping another player down, preferably the other player most likely to win.

## **Interacting with the Factions**

As the Vagabond, you have the ability to either outright help or hinder other factions while still scoring points. In fact they are arguably your main ways of doing so. The catch is determining who to do what to. Victory points in Root are actually a mediocre method at best of assessing outright who is likely to win, as different factions score at different rates and in different ways. For example, the Marquise tends to score pretty well for the first half of the game while building slots abound and then worse later on as the map starts to fill up, while the Alliance can just be all over the place.

## **The Marquise de Cat**

As mentioned previously, the Cats can make pretty safe targets for Aid as they get less out of non-bird cards than the other factions, bar the Eyrie perhaps, and are easily kept in line. The downside to this friendship is it is kind of one sided – while the Cats will make some items, they aren't quite as flexible in crafting as other factions. Your best hope here is that you can stop them attacking you, because Cats with a strong army can be quite a threat to you. If you want to assess how strong the Cats are, there are two things to look at. First, look at how many slots are open for them to build in right now. Assess each of those as being worth about two victory points. Secondly, watch out for a dominance victory – do they have a large army in a good position to take several territories? In the late game, having a decently strong Cats around can be good for points farming too, they tend to have the most things on the board you can cut up and serve as victory points for yourself.

I think the important thing here is watch to make sure the Cats don't get too weak, they are very good at keeping the Alliance, the other faction which can suddenly win out of nowhere, in line.

## **The Eyrie Dynasties**

The Eyrie is probably the most straightforward faction to assess in terms of their likelihood of victory. Just look at how many bases they have and will be able to hold, and how far up the track they are. Short of a burst of points from Despot you should know exactly how much they are threatening to take the win from you. Aiding them is somewhat safe, and I feel like bird cards are deceptively safe to give them – the Eyrie typically only wants a few of those anyway. Although the Eyrie can actually be not entirely bad at crafting, they rarely do so, finding that the one victory point cap on items means they benefit you more than them.

## **The Woodland Alliance**

Strong crafters, the Alliance can be tempting friends. You should absolutely aid them if they have good items for you, but be warned about forming a strong bond with them. Every card you give them translates to about a victory point, and it can be quite easy for a careless Vagabond to overfeed the Alliance. Your crossbow is very good at negating their Guerrilla Warfare ability, and the Sympathy tokens make for good points. The key with the Alliance is just to judge how many cards, officers and bases they have. Those are the point-getters, so even an Alliance with few victory points can suddenly spike huge scores if they have an abundance of those resources.

## **The Lizard Cult**

Another faction that can craft decently well, and another faction that receives great benefits from cards. Since cards are both extra actions and points for the Lizards, I would be very very careful about aiding them. Their abundance of warriors and buildings can make them great targets for attack though, and they do struggle to fight back, just make sure not to give them too many acolytes. Target the gardens with the lightest defences for huge point-scoring rounds while also keeping them in check.

## **The Riverfolk Company**

The Riverfolk are capable of recruiting decently sized armies while having no obligation to defend territories, making them a large threat to you. Thankfully, killing Riverfolk warriors is a good way to deny them victory points and gets some for you as well. Attacking them can also be a fairly safe bet as their role in keeping down other factions is mostly limited to small surgical strikes on undefended territories, something you can do just as well and get more points out of than they can. They are good crafters too, however, so you might be able to get a few items out of them first. Just be careful, giving them good cards makes them more profit than you.

## **Closing Remarks**

This ended up being a bit hard to write because the Vagabond, more than the other factions, is a bit of a leaf on the wind. Correctly playing them requires mostly just capitalising on what opportunities are available to you, but more importantly I think the Vagabond is already pretty intuitive. Certainly from what I've seen, the difference between a successful Vagabond and an unsuccessful one has been more based upon how observant the player is at recognising ways they can score victory points than any special strategy I've seen them employ. Still, I hope I've helped point out some of the threats and opportunities that you may find in your games. Next up is the Lizards.

## **Root Guide: Chapter 6 –** **The Lizard Cult**

So this is kind of one I've been dreading for a while, as I don't think the Lizards gel particularly well with my thought patterns on how to play a game of Root. I've not played as many games with the expansion factions in general but with the Riverfolk I've at least been lucky enough to see several very good players in actions whose strategies I can 'adopt' when it's time to write that guide. For this guide then I'm mostly going to discuss the pitfalls I've seen other Lizards players fall into, while pointing out a few things I have discovered in my honestly only a handful of games as the Cult. With that inspiring introduction out of the way, here are the Lizards.

So right out of the gate, scoring for two victory points is pretty good, and you should consider that the default scoring level and not 'save cards' for three and four victory points. Two victory points for an action and a card is a better trade then any other faction can make, tied with a Vagabond at max relationship with a faction. And you don't need to worry about moving between clearings! Consider also that you'll be starting with most of the clearings you need to pull that off right off the bat, so you can start scoring four to six VP a turn really quite quickly, depending on card draw luck. To put the scoring power of the Lizards in perspective, you can have as many card draws and score per turn on two clearings as the Eyrie on six! Now of course that depends on card draw luck, and I am not advocating that as the optimal strategy, I just want to point out the insane score generation potential of the Lizards.

### **Crafting**

Like the Marquise, your biggest weakness as the Lizards is your actions. While the Cats are restricted purely by number of actions, you're more restricted by type of actions and when you can take them. Regardless, the outcome is the same: all of the Rabbit upgrades are very good for you. Cobbler gives you a chance to rearrange your defences, Command Warren reduces the threat of Sympathy tokens to your important clearings and Better Burrow Bank just gives you a sixth action every turn. However, unlike the Cats, who have to work for and plan around picking up these cards, you'll just be stumbling into them for the most part. In general pick up whatever you want if you can craft it at that moment, but your biggest restriction will be the outcast suit and not your amount of crafters. You may also be the only faction that might wish to hold on to Stand and Deliver as well, three cost cards aren't especially hard for you to craft and card draws for you are simply better then for the other factions, and giving the losing player a victory point is not a bad trade for an extra action every turn – just remember that the player most likely to lose may not necessarily be the one currently on the lowest amount of points at the current point. Speaking of three cost cards being easy for you to craft, naturally hold on to Favor cards, but watch out for making yourself a target by revealing them; I'm not saying don't reveal them at all but I'm also not saying don't not reveal them.

### **Getting Established**

I find the biggest issue I have with the Lizards is the difficulty of expansion in the late game. Not being able to reliably attack is a pretty big weakness, so my recommendation is to focus your first few turns on locking down the clearings we need to have two gardens of each suit. Get these gardens down as soon as possible to claim the territories; you can worry about making them defensible later but right now just having ownership is crucial. For these first few turns, I would mostly ignore scoring and focus purely on trying to get to four card draws.

Now with the way Lizards work, the clearings you go for can really be anywhere, but for the first few you claim I suggest you go as safe as possible. We want to be able to keep the four card draws up reliably, so having a few territories out of the way, like on the edge of the map, is a good bet. Once we have four, or at least three, card draws locked down we enter the Lizards mid game.

## **The Mid Game**

So I'm going to take a moment here to discuss acolytes, both their generation and their use. One could in theory throw out warriors into annoying spots to try and get them killed and turned into acolytes, but I find using them to capture and hold territories just... safer. I find I get enough from the bird cards I draw and I want every warrior I have to be doing something. As for performing conspiracies, my main advice here is there are only two things worth spending acolytes on when the outcast isn't hated – throwing the Eyrie into turmoil or taking out an Alliance base if they have a lot of cards in sympathy.

Outside of those situations, you want to try and save all your acolytes for a hated outcast. To allow this to happen, cosy up to the factions that discard cards readily, the Cats and the Alliance especially. Pick a mutual enemy of yours, do they have something important on a suit that you want to be hated or the outcast for your own reasons? Congratulations, you've just scored a triple victory of accomplishing your own goal, crippling another player and making a friend! Also keep in mind that the cards you discard during your turn contribute to next round's outcast, so you can help things moving along there.

Sanctify is a key conspiracy to dwell on for a second, as it makes you the great obstructionist of the woodland. Your mere presence in the game means the Alliance and the Eyrie have to suddenly play a different game. The key here is to use it wisely. I'll discuss buildings to target specifically in a later faction-specific section, but remember that each use of sanctify is two warriors not on the board. Conversion turns an attacker into a defender and negates any past losses, as well as acting as a great way to take new territories. I would consider converting a few warriors then attacking better than just sanctifying them, even if it uses more acolytes and actions; just watch out for ambushes.

For more general play in the mid game, you're naturally deciding between scoring and taking actions. At the start of the guide I recommended scoring liberally and I want to echo that sentiment here, but of course if you need to defend something or see an opportunity to take a new territory then sure, don't score for a round. The same goes if the card could be crafted for something more important. If you're sitting on four card draws it's not like you're not discarding a bunch of cards as it is.

Another quick tip to put in here is that you really want to consider whether playing an Ambush card is worthwhile. It's effectively sacrificing an acolyte, so make sure the hostile army is actually a threat to you before you play the card. If you're just going to lose a few warriors you can immediately get back next turn then what's the point? In fact I'm just going to outright say that I see Ambush cards abused quite frequently in this game by all factions, remember they are a rare resources with only 5 in game. Many times I've seen players ambush an army of five warriors attacking their undefended or lightly defended buildings, to which the attacking player merely says “well, okay” then rolls and clears out whatever was there regardless. Save them for small raids. If you have a large army defending against another large army it's better to wait for a second attack action to see if you get a good roll on the first attack; if you ambush then they just roll a three and a zero then you've wasted an ambush.

As for which cards to discard I really haven't worked out any general advice here. I would avoid focusing purely on keeping on suit. On one hand, you do get quite efficient returns on scoring, but I think that maintaining card draws is more important. It also means you're pushing the outcast suit away from the territories you're strongest in, which cuts both ways as it means you're going to have more targets for conspiracies but less opportunities for crafting and defensive conversion. Ultimately, I recommend you keep yourself flexible here and discard based off your plans for the next turn. Is there an easy clearing you can swarm into and take? You're going to want those cards then. This is why I emphasise card draws so much – they give you the options you need to adapt to the situation at hand. Just keep thinking ahead and planning your actions for next turn and it should be hard to go wrong.

## **Winning the Game**

Not much to say here other than keep on doing what you've been doing beforehand. Like the Alliance, you want to keep a rough idea of your per-turn scoring potential so that when you're getting around the twenty victory point mark you're in a good position to seal the deal in one dramatic turn. Once you're at this stage, you're free to recklessly sanctify buildings for the victory points, before attacking some other undefended pieces of cardboard then just discarding to score as much as you can. Remember to check if you can craft a card before you discard it for score as well; crafting and scoring in one suit in a turn can be a nice chunk of points!

## **Idle Speculation**

Now there is another strategy I want to put forward that I haven't managed to try or witness but appears to have a lot of potential, which is a Lizards dominance victory. Right off the bat you have a lot going for you in this regard – warriors that you lose defending the dominance clearings just get to be used as acolytes next round and the enemy will have to get right down to your gardens and clear those out if they want to stop you. I feel like the strategy here will start off the same as the victory points strategy, i.e. building your card draws, but mostly recruiting and trying to crusade and clear out your targeted clearings while curating mostly cards of that suit – just remember that by discarding cards of other suits you'll end up not being able to sanctify any buildings on the clearings you want to control. The catch to this and why I haven't immediately gravitated towards it as the optimal strategy like I did with the Cats is that the key to a Marquise dominance victory is their ability to go aggressive and clear out all the threats to them before they activate the dominance. A Lizards dominance victory would require you outlasting the enemy with little opportunity to weaken them beforehand.

## **Interacting with the Other Factions**

### **The Marquise de Cat**

As a big fan of playing as the Cats, let me tell you the Lizards can make your game really frustrating. The trick to achieving this is the Lizards is to not get distracted by the many targets for sanctification that the Cats will give you, but to assess what is key for them at this point in time. In general, sanctifying clearings that will make reinforcing or using wood in other clearings more difficult for the Cats is a great way to make their life frustrating, but there are a few things to look for to judge which type of building is going to hurt the most for them to lose. In the early to mid game, workshops they've just built are likely intended to be used for crafting next turn, making them an ideal target. Clearings with two sawmills, especially if the cats have very few sawmills, are fantastic targets as sanctifying only one will make the Cats unable to use the wood from either. Targeting recruiters helping the defence of key clearings like the five-connection fox clearing or remote borders also slows down the Marquise.

Outside of Sanctification, you want to abuse the Cat's inability to bypass your gardens to create choke points for them filled with lots of warriors that they must attack to hurt you. Map control is a speciality of yours, partition and box in the Cats and they can't do anything. Also keep an eye out for dominance cards they may wish to play, if they look likely to go for one have a sanctify ready and a plan, usually involving convincing other players to discard the right cards, to make the suit of that card the outcast.

### **The Eyrie Dynasties**

Remember that due to the linear order the Eyrie must resolve their actions in, they can never attack, move and attack again. This means that within one turn, gardens essentially form an impenetrable barrier to them, so they can never attack a more important clearing behind one with just one garden you don't care about. Choke points are especially hard to deal with as the Eyrie for this reason. Building gardens in territories they may want to build in also forces them to co-ordinate attacks and builds well, and pushes them further towards a less stable decree, if not forcing them into turmoil outright on a bad roll.

What's more, your mere presence in the game makes recruiting on anything other than bird cards a risky proposition. If they do start recruiting on fox, mouse or rabbit cards and if they are at all likely to win the game, it shouldn't be too hard to co-ordinate with other players to sanctify those roosts. Remember there is no way to prevent a turmoil on Recruit as the Eyrie.

## **The Woodland Alliance**

I discussed the Alliance perspective of this match-up heavily in my guide for them, but in short, although it is commonly observed that the Lizards have a great counter to the Alliance in the form of sanctifying their bases, I am of the opinion that the Alliance poses a great threat to the Lizards as well, if not a greater one. Essentially, you really struggle to deal with sympathy as you lack a flexible and easy way of attacking. You can't ignore sympathy as it doesn't generate acolytes when the Alliance revolts, yet dealing with it may result in you giving two cards to the Alliance before your turn. The first trick here is to craft Command Warren as soon as possible, as this gives you that flexible attack that you need. Beyond that, try to come to a bit of an understanding with the Alliance. Essentially, you both have great ways of attacking each other without reprisal, so do they really want to start that fight?

## **The Vagabond**

A lot of my discussion on dealing with individual factions, and the guide as a whole, has been centred on Sanctify. This is admittedly because most of my writing here is based on fighting against the Lizards rather than playing as them, so I'm drawing on what the most difficult part of playing against them is – losing key structures with no opportunity to defend them. So for the Vagabond this leaves me little to mention, I've never been annoyed by a Lizards player in my Vagabond games. Interaction here is pretty one sided, as the Vagabond cannot be sanctified, converted or impeded by gardens. You can crusade against them or attack them with Command Warren, but that's never an attractive proposition for you as the risk of losing your warriors on the offensive kind of sucks. Outside of that your best way of dealing with a Vagabond is not to get too carried away attacking someone who actually has tools to deal with them, which is pretty much anyone other than the Alliance.

The other side of this coin is that there is a lot the Vagabond can do to you – good and bad. Talk to them, try to establish as beneficial a relationship as you can without giving them too much of a leg up; you want them to be aiding you, not crossbow-ing your warriors (remembering that you only generate acolytes in combat and apparently getting shot in the head with a crossbow bolt does not count as being in a fight) or attacking your most vulnerable gardens for free points.

## **The Riverfolk Company**

Before Cole reworked the Lizards, the best way to win as the Lizards was to convince a friend to play the Otters. To post-rework Lizards, the Otters remain just as true a friend. You have the most spare warriors in the game and get the most out of extra cards, so the key here is not to get carried away and give the Otters the game by over-feeding them. My golden rule with the Otters is to try to co-ordinate the table to never buy more than one service a round from them: they will inevitably get out more of your patronage than you will. I would thus advise you try to make yourself the sole patron of the Riverfolk and really assess what cards will be most key to you; don't get carried away with your new-found purchasing power. Also. remember to be sure of what the outcast suit will be before you buy; while technically the purchasing of cards comes before the determination of the outcast there is nothing stopping you counting the lost souls, buying cards and then adjusting. Just counting cards in the lost souls pile isn't an action and is doable at any time. Or just have them neatly organised and pre-sorted by suit.



## **Closing Remarks**

Now that this and the Vagabond guide are both out of the way, the two guides I was least looking forward to are now done. I'm not entirely happy with either, but I hope that I have at least provided a launching off point for more discussion and for myself to further understand these factions. I hope in the future I have time to get in more games and then revise what I have written, not just here but throughout the entire guide.

On the Lizards though, I feel my key advice really is just to not neglect scoring. By no means do I advise scoring recklessly – protecting your gardens is important – but ultimately you have an extremely high scoring potential that you can abuse quite readily. As I have mentioned previously in this guide, don't get distracted by the three or four victory point scoring opportunities and neglect the two victory point scoring actions, as even two points for a card is very good.

My last guide will be the Riverfolk. Although I haven't had as many games as them as I would like, I have been lucky enough to play against several incredibly formidable Otters players. I'll thus dedicate the next guide to Bankey and Hattldo from the Woodland Warriors Discord server, who showed me that far from being peaceful traders, the Otters are a true force to be reckoned with in battle.

## **Root Guide: Chapter 7 –** **The Riverfolk Company**

Well, the last guide! Until I get my hands on The Underworld expansion, anyway. Up until now I've generally tried to avoid talking heavily about the social aspect to Root. I've certainly mentioned it in some cases, but for the most part I've been writing about what I feel are safe strategies that largely ignore diplomacy. Your group negotiation metagame is likely unique to you and your friends, so the best I can do is give you a good foundation to start off with that doesn't assume much about how you interact with the other players.

So when it comes to discussing the Riverfolk, who are after all the most 'social' faction in the game, let me just state outright that how well you can convince other players to overcome their natural inhibitions and buy from you is going to have an outsized effect on how easy the game is for you. If you're like me, the type of person to write a twenty-thousand-word-plus guide on Board Game Geek, with friends who all consider you the largest threat no matter the game and faction because you're the one who owns the game, this may be difficult for you. So I'm just going to leave it up to you largely to decide how you're going to sell your services to your fellow players. You know how well lying, over-the-top pitching or rational discussion is going to work and how comfortable you are with those things.

I can, however, give you a few pieces of advice on making sales. First, always be drawing cards - try to maintain a full stock of cards and then organise them from oldest to newest; be sure to replace the oldest cards whenever you have spare actions. Replacing cards frequently also increases your chances of getting really good cards which you can sell for more. Second, remember to make people aware of what you can do for them. Make a note to the table if you draw a good card, point out opportunities for other players to use riverboats and mercenaries. Many players will simply forget to check these things. Third, remember that you'll get more business in the first half of the game than the second half, unless you're doing very badly, as your fellow players become more skittish around aiding you. Finally, be unassuming – be wary of pushing ahead too early or banking too many warriors.

### **Crafting**

So the Otters are very flexible crafters and you can generally get out whatever you want. The catch is that you can't hide any good cards – though you can increase your prices to four to discourage other players buying them off you. The thing is that it may consume multiple actions to make anything, so you want to pick your upgrades carefully. I suggest cards that keep your warriors alive first and foremost, i.e. Armorers and Scouting Party. Everything else you can just grab if you like and have spare warriors, with perhaps Brutal Tactics on the short list. If you've only ever thought of the Otters as traders these may be weird picks for you, but if you've read my previous guides then you'll have noted that the Riverfolk have very cheap actions but very expensive recruitment so keeping your warriors on the board is ideal for you.

### **Playing as the Riverfolk**

So for every other guide I've included a few paragraphs here on your first few rounds and the establishment of your engine. The catch is the Otters don't really have an engine that I've ever used. I mean in theory you can craft for more warriors but you need to do that three times in one turn to more than break even with Protectionism and that hardly seems worthwhile.

The Riverfolk action economy, instead, gets more powerful as they make more sales and less powerful the more they spend themselves - remember that whenever you spend a warrior you've denied yourself an action in every subsequent round. With that in mind, we establish one of the main ideas I want to get across to Riverfolk players – committing funds for victory points is better than spending them.

I want to establish all that because I believe the largest pitfall of the Riverfolk is the mindset of “I want to make trades so I can buy trading posts and thus make more trades”. Whenever I see the phrase “The Riverfolk start out strong but then struggle to make it to thirty victory points” I know I've seen someone fall into that pit. The fact is that if you think of the Riverfolk as purely traders you're going to set yourself up to taper off towards the end of the game as people are less willing to trade with you – and also less able, as they want all their warriors for fighting if possible.

Instead, think of the Riverfolk as something more. Think of them as shady mercenaries, brutal opportunists and industrious entrepreneurs all rolled into one. The fact is that if you're relying on trading you've only got eighteen victory points you can get from trading posts before you run out, and relying on scoring dividends will just lose you funds as you can't defend your trading posts well. Further, since spending funds for trading posts is such an easy way to get points you'll likely gain a lead early game, resulting in more hostility towards you and less purchasing (which is still important).

So in order to win we want to save those easy trading post victory points for the late game and until then focus on scoring through other means, preferably those that rely less on spending and more on committing. For that, we need combat and crafting. Yes, both of these things will require some spending, to get your warriors on the board and trading posts to craft at, but the key here is to work this into your other goals of keeping the funds coming in and not appearing threatening. Too many warriors on your faction board gets others antsy, so moving a few off isn't too bad.

The reason I suggest combat is that the Otters are far better at it then you may realise. While they don't have many warriors on the board, those pieces have no defensive obligations - if we're not scoring dividends the only thing that bothers us about losing trading posts is the victory points the other factions get from it. Further, due to their aquatic nature and abundance of actions the Otters are incredibly mobile, making a squad of them a pseudo-vagabond capable of reaching vulnerable structures and breaking them down for points.

The key to combat is picking your targets wisely and the catch here is that this is hard. The factions with the most tokens and buildings also have the most warriors and are the most eager to trade with you. Picking off sympathy tokens is always nice; the Alliance isn't a threat to you, nor will they trade with you much. I'll go by faction by faction later but remember that people generally don't take kindly to Otter hit-squads. In general, though, just aim for the person doing the best.

There is another aspect to all this that you can try and that is getting patronage from another player, or even players. This will depend on how well you can convince other players to trust you, but if you can find people willing to fund your attacks on someone the board considers a mutual threat, then you can benefit from the deal yourself without seeming too selfish. Consider a Vagabond you want to beat up. You can't get victory points off them, sure, but that's also a pretty good reason for others to fund your efforts to hurt them! Getting someone to provide you a few warriors you can immediately convert to your own to whittle down a large army (and hopefully keep a few of when the dust is settled) is beneficial for both of you. Further, you may even be able to get someone to pay you to wage a war on their behalf, though this is tricky.

Crafting for victory points is another way to obtain them. I recommend weaving both this and combat together, but if you draw lots of cards worth a good amount of victory points then feel free to focus on them. Take a moment to check the chart in the first chapter of the guide, and note again that it doesn't take many crafters to have access to most of the cards. Here I would suggest getting out a couple of trading posts early, without rushing them per se, and matching the suit of the cards you want to craft. Seeing as you want to focus on mouse crafting as it is, getting out one mouse trading post early is a safe bet, as well as a rabbit so you only need to throw down one more to craft any coins you draw. Fox contains some good victory point cards for sure, as well as Brutal Tactics, but you don't want the Vagabond to get those items so as always be careful if they are in the game.

It occurs to me that I've not mentioned setting prices yet, and I honestly have little advice here other than “never let someone pay one warrior for something”. It negates Protectionism, which sucks for you, and is kind of cheap anyway. I'm glad the option is there, because you might be in a niche scenario where you need to give a bunch of services to someone for cheap to stop someone else winning, but outside of that you're just leaving yourself open to be weakened. As a rough guide beyond that, keep most of your prices at two or three, unless you get a favor card. Either someone buys it off you for four or you craft it yourself.

Once you're in the fifteen to twenty points range you can start working on your final burst of points. This is where you can start spending a little more recklessly. Your last turn should consist of throwing down a few trading posts with whatever warriors you have left of the other factions, as well as attacking the juiciest target with your own and crafting, then throwing down more trading posts on the now cleared-out territories with your own warriors.

## **Interacting with the Other Factions**

### **Marquise de Cat**

Bird cards are always a tasty treat for the Marquise so having a few of those in hand when the Cats are in play is always useful. They will also want Rabbit crafting cards, so you can probably charge a bit more for those. I also want to discuss the 'destroying the keep first round' strategy, where you place your opening four otters adjacent to the keep then destroy it first turn, just to say 'don't do it'. Not only are you making one of your friends quite sad, you're alienating the Cats for no especially good reason while strengthening their enemies, who are not as good trading partners as the Cats. I've seen suggestions of blockading important woodpiles to charge the Cats for their use and I think this is a better route to take, but don't be too over the top with it. Positioning a few otters between two sawmills for some 'other' reason like hitting the Vagabond or something and then saying 'oh it's okay you can just get Mercenaries off of me and it's good' is what I call 'thinking like an Otter'.

Another reason to not immediately jump on the Cats is that late game they are worth a lot of points to conquer, having the most combined buildings and tokens in the game. Letting them get started a bit before you attack them means more score for you.

### **The Eyrie Dynasties**

Another fantastic potential patron simply due to the fact that you can sell to them before they place their decree that turn. Nothing you can do here to predict this, but just remind them every turn of that fact and you might find you have just what they need to not turmoil that turn. During set-up in particular, remember that your cards become available for viewing before they pick their leader, so you may present an opportunity to them.

### **The Woodland Alliance**

Very unlikely to trade with you and very likely to place down tokens everywhere. When the Alliance is in play, it's good to scatter a few warriors around and pick on their sympathy. It's not like the cards or the actions matter to you – just don't go around moving into their clearings too much to attack them and instead consider recruiting warriors directly to their sympathy tiles if you can. They make Scouting Party doubly essential, as you do not want to get ambushed attacking a sympathy token.

### **The Vagabond**

An interesting one, as while the Vagabond is typically pretty unwilling to trade with you they also make an excellent pin cushion. It's no secret that the Vagabond has an outsized win rate (currently, the Woodland Warriors Discord tracking sheet has them having won twenty-five of the forty-nine games they are in) due to what many believe is a lack of incentive to attack them. Well, you have an incentive, in that you can get someone else to pay you to attack them, with you keeping the leftover warriors as 'change'. There is a catch to this, though, and that is the other table members need to be aware of how large a threat the Vagabond is and not

see you as a greater one. The hammer is another one of those cards that it's worth upping your price to four over if the Vagabond is in the game, or just discarding it (or even better, convincing someone else to buy it!) to keep it out of their paws. Assuming your Vagabond is not the Tinkerer, being denied a hammer will mean they cannot craft more swords until the deck goes through again, which is a pretty nice thing.

Even if you don't get paid to attack them, don't be afraid to poke them if they come near. It's just good strategy to keep them down a bit.

## **The Lizard Cult**

Your ideal trading partner, the Lizards benefit greatly from all your services and have the most warriors spare out of any faction. Even better, they fill up the board with gardens that don't restrict your movement as much as others, giving you the run of the board provided you stick to and near rivers. As discussed in the Lizards guide, every card they get before their actions is an extra action, so be sure to remind them of that and talk about all the wonderful things they could do if only they had this card right here. If they trust you enough, you can also convince them to buy mercenaries off of you to help gain control of a clearing to put a garden there! There is a lot they can get out of you, so don't let them forget that. You can also do the fighting for them on your turn as well, as that is something they struggle with, or you can strike a deal with them to draw and discard a bunch of cards to manipulate the Outcast suit in their favour.

The best thing is, as much as they get out of trade with you, you get out more. And once you're in the last stage of the game, you can attack all those gardens you helped build, and they will struggle to stop you.

## **Closing Remarks**

Ultimately the take-away point from all this is that it's best to save your easy trading post scoring for later in the game and rely on crafting and combat to get you the extra twelve or so points you need otherwise. Disregard dividends with the exception of maybe one victory point here or there early game as they are just too difficult for you to rely on and cost you actions you could have gotten safer victory points from. Convince your friends to buy things off you, but if you score well without spending your funds then you won't need huge amounts of cards purchases to win.

Well, that's the end of this guide. My word processor has it as thirty-four pages, so I feel like it's better described as a thesis. Still, I intend to go back and add more as well as doing some revision, and with the new expansion coming out soon I hope to discuss those factions too. That won't be for a while however, I'll want to play them a bit first!

I see that when I posted this originally I said I'd release this over a few weeks, which I didn't think at the time meant seven. So, thanks for sticking with all of this, and I look forward to improving it further.

## **A few more statements...**

So this hopefully isn't going to be the final .pdf I do of this guide nor the final version. I fully intend to go back and revise my former statements and write up guides for the new factions, but for now I want to take a bit of a break and just play a bunch of games to gain some more experience.

I've played a bit of The Underworld too, so I'll sign off with some musing I just wrote up on Board Game Geek on the new content.

### **The Great Underground Duchy**

The Moles are a lot of fun to play and I highly recommend having a bit of a crack at them. Price of Failure is an interesting game play mechanic that makes me tentatively suggest a highly conservative play style. You only need to lock down six building slots as the Moles to be at maximum strength, something that you should be able to do with just three clearings. Your early game is quite weak until you get buildings and a few key lords out (Chief and Controller are both excellent) and are able to defend yourself but once you're past that stage you're quite the powerhouse.

### **The Mountain Map**

The key feature of this map to me is the bonus points you can get from controlling the pass and removing closed paths. This completely changes my recommendation for Cats to focus on dominance, and on this map I think a score victory is the ideal for the Marquise with holding down the pass your absolutely priority. In general the map favours the major factions (Those with large armies and for whom conquest and control is a big focus of their style of play) and plays out a bit more strategically then the Autumn map.

Movement is quite interesting as well. With it initially being so restricted I've noted the opening turns tend to be quite quiet, which really benefits factions that want a couple of turns to get their engine going. There is also a strong left/right divide in play, as until paths start being removed the only way from one side of the map to the other is the pass.